



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

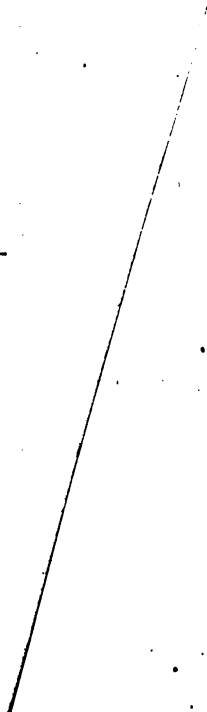
803  
TroA  
S







Stack  
683  
Tr. A  
28





WIT  
EDY ~~WIT~~ AMERICA  
ACADEMY  
IN ROM  
A SIREN.

BY

T. ADOLPHUS TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF "THE GARSTANGS OF GARSTANG GRANGE."

*COPYRIGHT EDITION.*

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1870.

*The Right of Translation is reserved.*

This One



NJGF-99P-EAUW







Stack  
683  
Tr. A  
S

# CONTENTS

## O F V O L U M E I I.

---

### B O O K I V. — *Continued.*

#### THE LAST DAYS OF THE CARNIVAL.

|                                                        | Page |
|--------------------------------------------------------|------|
| CHAPTER III. "La Sonnambula" . . . . .                 | 7    |
| — IV. The Marchese Lamberto's Correspondence . . . . . | 20   |
| — V. Bianca at Home . . . . .                          | 30   |
| — VI. Paolina at Home . . . . .                        | 45   |
| — VII. Two Interviews . . . . .                        | 53   |
| — VIII. A Carnival Reception . . . . .                 | 62   |
| — IX. Paolina's Return to the City . . . . .           | 72   |

### B O O K V.

#### WHO DID THE DEED?

|                                                      |     |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| CHAPTER I. At the City Gate . . . . .                | 83  |
| — II. Suspicion . . . . .                            | 98  |
| — III. Guilty or Not Guilty? . . . . .               | 109 |
| — IV. The Marchese hears the Ill News . . . . .      | 120 |
| — V. Doubts and Possibilities . . . . .              | 133 |
| — VI. At the Circolo again . . . . .                 | 146 |
| — VII. A Prison Visit . . . . .                      | 154 |
| — VIII. Signor Giovacchino Fortini at Home . . . . . | 162 |
| — IX. The Post-Mortem Examination . . . . .          | 175 |
| — X. Public Opinion . . . . .                        | 188 |
| — XI. In Father Fablano's Cell . . . . .             | 196 |
| — XII. The Case against Paolina . . . . .            | 203 |



# A S I R E N.

---

## BOOK IV.—*Continued.*

### THE LAST DAYS OF THE CARNIVAL.

#### CHAPTER III.

##### "La Sonnambula."

It may be easily imagined that the Marchese returned from the Corso very little disposed to take any pleasure in the treat to which all Ravenna was looking forward, and which he would have enjoyed more than any one else under other circumstances—the performance at the theatre on that Sunday evening. Nevertheless, the duty of attending it had to be done. All Ravenna would have been astonished, and have wanted to "know the reason why," if the Marchese had been absent from his box on such an evening. "Society" expected it of him that he should be there, and he had been all his life doing everything that "society" expected of him; besides, his presence there really was needed, and poor little Ercole Stadione would have despaired inconsolably if he had been deprived, on such an occasion, of the support of his great friend and patron.

But if none of these reasons had existed—if the Marchese, when he reached the shelter of his own roof after that horrible Corso, had been entirely free to go to bed and escape the necessity of facing the eyes of all the world of Ravenna, which seemed to him to be from hour to hour growing into a more terrible ordeal, would he have *gone* to bed and abstained from attending the theatre?

It might have been very confidently predicted that he would not have done so. He began, in an unreasoning animal-like sort of way, to recognize the fact that every hour that he spent away from this woman was bare, barren, and of no value to him at all. He was conscious that he could be said to live only in her presence. He was beginning to give himself up as a lost man, and to acquiesce, half-stunned and stupid, in a fatality which he could not struggle against.

And now he was longing—burning not only to have his eyes on her again, but to speak to her. He would have plenty of opportunities of doing so at the theatre in the green-room, or in her dressing-room, and every minute seemed to him an age till he could find such an opportunity.

If he had been asked at that minute—if he had himself asked of his own mind—what he meant to do—to what future he was looking, whether he meant to marry La Lalli or to give her up, he would probably have repudiated either alternative with equal violence. His mind was in a state of chaos; and what was to come in any future, except the most immediate one, he had become incapable of considering. Now he was going to see, to hear, to breathe the same atmosphere with her again, and to go through the wretched task

of striving to behave as usual, and look as usual in the eyes of all Ravenna.

The performance was to commence at half-past eight o'clock, and the Marchese, reaching the theatre nearly half-an-hour before that time, found Bianca sufficiently nearly dressed for him to be admitted to her dressing-room. She was putting the finishing touches to the platting of her magnificent hair, after the fashion of a Swiss village-girl, for the completion of her toilette as Amina. He thought that, in this new costume, she looked more irresistibly attractive than he had yet seen her.

"Bianca," he said, as soon as her dresser had left her, and shut the door, "you have made me so miserable to-day. I must tell you openly at once what is in my heart. I saw, to-day, at the Corso—by no means intending to look at all at your carriage after it had passed mine—I saw my poor flowers thrown away by you, while you were throwing a bouquet to my nephew and receiving from him something thrown in return. Bianca, is that the conduct of a woman who has the very same morning accepted the hand of another man? Bianca, I warn you to beware; you do not know what such a love as mine, if it should discover itself to be betrayed, might be capable of."

"Marchese, do not look at me in that way; you frighten me, and what have I done? It is all a mistake, entirely a mistake!" said the poor Diva, really frightened at the manner of the Marchese.

"Did I not see you throw the flowers I had given you from your carriage; evidently for the purpose of gratifying another person?"

"Oh, Marchese! how is it possible that such a



thought should enter into your head? Ah, how little you know. If you knew how I had grieved over the loss of the beautiful bouquet that had come from your hand! It fell from the carriage by accident; and it was snatched up, and a boy ran off with it, all in a moment; I would have given anything to get it back again."

"But how came the accident? It was caused by your leaning out of your carriage to throw a bouquet yourself."

"Yes, exactly so; to the Marchese Ludovico. He was the only person to whom I threw a bouquet in all the Corso."

"And why should you throw one to him?"

"To him,—to your nephew? Why not, I should not have thought of doing so to another. But to him——"

"And what was it, pray, that he threw to you? I wonder whether he thought, too, that he should not dream of throwing anything to anybody except you."

"The Marchese Ludovico threw nothing to me. Just at the same moment that troublesome idiot, the Conte Leandro, threw a packet into the carriage. I have not even opened it; you may have it unopened the next time you are in the Strada di Porta Sisi, if you like. No doubt it contains some of his charming verses. It is not kind of you, Signor Marchese, to say such things, or to have such thoughts in your head!" said Bianca, turning away her face and putting her handkerchief to her eyes. "And now," she added, you have made my eyes all red just before I have to go on the stage!"

Of course once again the unhappy Marchese was entirely routed, and the Diva was victorious.

"Forgive me, Bianca," he whispered; "I think only of you from the morning to the evening, and from the evening to the morning again. And it would be impossible for any man to love, as I love you, without a liability to jealousy. I *am* jealous of your love, Bianca!"

"But it is wonderful that you should not perceive how little cause you have for any such feeling. Oh, Marchese, how can you doubt me? Surely you must have seen and known how entirely my love is yours. You must not wring your poor Bianca's heart by such cruel suspicions."

And then the three knocks, which announced the raising of the curtain, were heard; and the Marchese again murmuring a request to be forgiven, as he kissed her hand, hurried away to take his place in his box.

The house was already nearly full, for the occasion was a notable one; and the opera was new to Ravenna; and everybody wished to hear every note of it. The Marchese Ludovico was not, however, in the Castelmare box, when his uncle reached it, but he came in a minute afterwards. He had been up to the upper tier of boxes to say a word to Paolina and her old friend, who were in the box he had provided for them, which was on the opposite side of the house to the Castelmare box, and exactly over that in the "piano nobile" in which were the Marchesa Anna Lanfredi, and her niece the Contessa Violante.

There was a little noise in the house of people not yet seated during the opening chorus of villagers;



both hand and voice. But the Marchese remained quiet in his corner, with his face half-shaded by his hand, conscious as he was that the expression of it might need hiding from the others in the box. He need not have heeded them; for their attention was too exclusively occupied with the stage for them to expend any of it on him. Had it been otherwise his hand, covering the lower half of his face, would not have sufficed to conceal his emotion.

Now again the hot fit of his love was in the ascendant. Never had Bianca more thoroughly captivated him. Never had it seemed to him less possible to live without her. What to him were all these dull and empty blockheads for whom he had hitherto lived, and who were now—the foul fiend seize them!—sharing with him the delight of seeing and hearing her for the last time. Yes, it should be for the last time. He would make her his, all his own; and carry her far away from all that could remind either her or himself of their past lives. And then a scowl of displeasure came over his face as his glance lighted on his nephew's noisy and unrestrained manifestations of enthusiastic admiration.

Presently, towards the end of the first act, came the duet between Amina and her lover, who has been made causelessly jealous, and Bianca sang the pretty lines—

"Son, mio bene, del zeffiro amante,  
Perchè ad esso il tuo nome confido.  
Amo il sol, perchè teco il divido,  
Amo il rio, perchè l' onda ti da,"

with a sweetness of expression perfectly irresistible.

The Marchese in his corner, half-shrouded from

the observation of the house by the curtain, which, though undrawn, hung down by the side of the box, but fully facing the stage, was perfectly aware that the singer had specially addressed herself to him; and he felt the full force of the loving rebuke for the unreasonable displeasure he had so recently manifested in her dressing-room. His heart went out towards her; and he felt that if it were to be done that moment, he could have led her to the altar in the face of all Christendom.

At the end of the act the plaudits were again vociferous, and four times was the smiling and triumphant Diva compelled by the calls and clamour of her worshippers to return before the curtain to receive their applause and salute them in return for it.

The Marchese Ludovico again loudly and enthusiastically joined in these manifestations; and then, when they were over, and the noise in the house had subsided, he quietly slipped out of the box, and springing up the stairs which communicated with the upper tier of boxes, entered that occupied by Paolina and the Signora Orsola Steno.

"What did you think of that, Paolina mia?" he said, sitting down by her side, and making the action of applauding with his hands, as he spoke. "Did you ever hear a thing more charmingly sung? Is she not divine?"

"There is no mistaking *your* opinion on the point, at all events, *amico mio*. I never saw anybody manifest such unbounded admiration as you did just now. But the Diva was not thinking of you, I can tell you," said Paolina, with just the slightest possible flavour of pique in her tone.

"Thinking of *me*; I should imagine not indeed. But what upon earth have you got into that dear little head of yours, my Paolina? Did not you think both singing and acting very fine?"

"Certainly I think her voice is perhaps the finest I ever heard in my life; and she is no doubt a great actress—a very great actress; but—she is not *simpatica* to me. I don't know why, but—somehow or other—I don't like her."

"What can you have got into your head, *tesoro mio*? You know nothing of her; you have nothing to do with her except to see and hear her on the stage——"

"No; thank heaven! I should not like that she should come any nearer to my life than that," replied Paolina, with a little shudder.

"Come, Paolina, you must admit that that is being prejudiced and unreasonable," said Ludovico, smiling at her.

"Yes; I suppose it is. But—Ludovico mio, just ask any other woman—any other good woman—in the house; and see if they have not the same feeling. The Contessa Violante, for example—ask her," said Paolina.

"Just because she is splendidly handsome: women cannot be just to each other when that comes in the way. But *you* might afford to be charitable even to so beautiful a creature as the Lalli, my Paolina."

"No, Signor, I won't be bribed by compliments, even from you," she whispered, with a look that showed that the value of the bribe was not unappreciated; "and I think that what you say is unjust to women in general."

"But I wonder what it is then that has prejudiced you against the Lalli?"

"I don't know. Really nothing that I can tell. One feels sometimes what one cannot explain. She is not *simpatica* to me, that is all."

"But what on earth put it into your head, Paolina mia, to say that she was not thinking of me when she was singing her part? Why should she think of me—or of anybody else, except the *primo tenore*, who was singing with her? What is it you mean?" said Ludovico, much puzzled.

"You said she was a very good actress as well as a fine singer," returned Paolina; "and I think she is. This is a capital box for seeing all that goes on on the opposite side of the theatre. And I can tell you who La Lalli *was* thinking of, and who she was singing at during her duet at the end of the act—your uncle, the Marchese Lamberto; and he knew it very well, too."

"What parcel of nonsense have you got into your little brains, Paolina? Sing at the Marchese? Of course they all do; of course they all know that his suffrage is of more importance to them than all the rest of the theatre put together. But as for my idea of—*lo zio*—of all men in the world. Ha, ha, ha! If you had lived in Ravenna instead of Venice all your life, *carina mia*, you would know how infinitely absurd the idea seems of there being anything between the Marchese Lamberto and a stage singer, or of its being possible for him to regard her in any other light than that of a singing machine."

"I dare say you are right, *caro mio*. Still I can't quite think that the Marchese would look at any one

of the fiddles quite as I saw him look at her," said Paolina.

And then the immense interval, which occurs between one act and another in Italian theatres, and which is tolerated with perfect contentment by Italian audiences, came to an end; and Ludovico hurried down to take his place again in the Castelmare box.

The next point in the opera which excited the special enthusiasm of the house was the impassioned finale to the second act, in which Amina on her knees strives to convince her lover of her innocence of having ever harboured a thought inconsistent with entire devotion to him. She sang as if her whole soul were in her words; and the entire theatre was electrified by the power of her acting; the entire theatre, with the exception of one intelligent and observant little face in a box on the upper tier, exactly opposite to that of the Marchese Lamberto.

From that vantage-ground of observation Paolina saw perfectly well both the singer on the stage and the Marchese in the box; and again felt sure that the actress was specially addressing herself with an implied meaning to the latter; and that he was aware that she was doing so. She felt no doubt that the motive for this was exactly that to which Ludovico had attributed it. It was important to the Diva to flatter and make a friend of so powerful a theatrical patron as the Marchese; and she took this very objectionable method, Paolina thought, of attaining that end. Paolina thought nothing more than this; but, nevertheless, it made her conceive a dislike for the Diva greater, perhaps, than the cause would seem to justify.

The interval between the second and the third act



Ludovico thought himself obliged to pass in the box of the Marchese Anna Lanfredi, in which Violante was sitting with her aunt. There, too, he found the ladies not quite disposed to be as frantically enthusiastic in their praises of the singer as the whole male part of the audience. The Marchesa Lanfredi thought that La Lalli was nothing at all in comparison with some singer who had charmed all Bologna some forty years before. And Violante, admitting that she had an exquisite voice and perfect method, confessed much as Paolina had done, that she did not quite like her, she hardly knew why.

In the third act, the song sung by the sleep-walker in her state of unconsciousness—"Ah non credea mirarti,"—was a great success. And most fascinatingly lovely the Diva looked in her white night-dress, with her wreath of rich auburn tresses hanging in luxuriant curls around her shoulders.

Shortly after this had been sung a liveried servant entered the Castelmare box, bearing a most superb bouquet of choice flowers, tied with a long streamer of broad rose-coloured ribbon, and deposited it on the front of the box.

And then came the joyful finale "*Ah non giunge.*" And in that the Diva seemed to surpass herself. It was a passionate carol of love, and joy, and triumph in which she seemed to pour the whole force and energy of her soul into the words and sounds that told the truth, the entirety, the perfection of her love, and the overwhelming happiness the recognition of it by its object gave her.

For many minutes the vociferous applause continued. The stage was covered with flowers flung

from all sides of the house. The Marchese Lamberto whispered a word or two to Ludovico; and then the latter, leaning far out of the box, presented the magnificent bouquet to Bianca, who was smiling and thanking the public for their plaudits by repeated curtsies, and who came for it to the side of the stage. She made a very low and graceful curtsey to Ludovico, as she took it from his hand; but her eyes thanked the Marchese Lamberto, who still remained close in his corner, for the gift.

The fact was that he was too much moved by violent and contending emotions to dare to trust himself to hand the flowers himself. He knew that he was shaking in every limb; and, therefore, had told his nephew to give the bouquet; which, indeed, it was quite a matter of course that a successful *prima donna* should receive from that box on such an occasion.

Again and again the curtain had to be raised after it had descended in obedience to the cries of the spectators, who were determined to make the Diva's triumph complete. Again and again she had to step back on the stage and make yet one more bow and smile—yet one more gracious smile.

During this delay the Marchese Lamberto slipped from his box and made his way behind the scenes.

"Can you feel as Bianca what you can so divinely express as Amina?" he whispered in her ear as he gave her his arm to lead her to her carriage at the stage-door.

"Try me as Amina was tried; and reward me as Amina was rewarded, and then see," she replied in the same tone.

And so ended Bianca Lalli's Carnival engagement at Ravenna.

## CHAPTER IV.

## The Marchese Lamberto's Correspondence.

THE next morning—the morning of the Monday after the gala performance at the theatre—the post brought to the Palazzo Castelmare a letter from Rome, before the Marchese had left his chamber. The servant took it to his master's room, found him still in bed, though awake, and left it on the table by his bedside.

The Marchese Lamberto was, and had been all his life, far too busy a man to be a late riser. Italians, indeed, who do nothing all day long, are often very early risers. Their climate leads them to be so. They sleep during hours which are less available for being out of doors—for your Italian idler passes very little of his day in his own home—and they are up and out during the delicious hours of the early morning. But the Marchese Lamberto, whose days were filled with the multiplicity of occupations and affairs that have been described in a previous chapter, was wont, at all times of the year, to rise early.

On the present occasion, a sleepless night—and such nights, also, were a new phenomenon in the Marchese's life—might have been, a reason for his being late. But he was not sleeping when his servant took the letter in to him. The frame of mind in which he returned from the theatre has been described. It lasted till he fell into a feverish sleep, soon after going to his bed.

The dreams that made such sleep anything but rest may be easily guessed. He was startled from them by the fancy that the kisses of Bianca burned his lips; that it was a scorching flame, that he was pressing in his arms, the contact of which turned all his blood to liquid fire.

He slept no more during the night. And the good that had seemed to him, as he sate in his box at the opera, more desirable than all the other goods the world could give, seemed good no longer; seemed, in the dark stillness of his night-thoughts, like a painted bait, with which the arch-tempter was luring him to his ruin and destruction.

Restlessly turning on his bed with a deep sigh, and pressing his hot hand to his yet hotter brow, he took the letter that had been brought him, and saw that it was from his Roman friend and correspondent, Monsignore Paterini:

"ILLUS<sup>MO</sup> SIGNOR MARCHESE E MIO BUONO E COLEND<sup>MO</sup> AMICO," the letter ran—"Seeing that the subject of my letter is matter adapted rather to Carnival than to Lenten tide, I hasten to write so that it may reach your lordship before the festive season is over. That your friends in Rome are never forgetful of one, who so eminently deserves all their best thoughts and good wishes, I trust I need not tell you. But in this our Rome, where so many interests are the unceasing care of so many powerful friends and backers, it needs such merit as that of your lordship to make the efforts of friends successful.

"Understand, then, that his Holiness has been kept constantly aware of all that Ravenna—the welfare of

which ancient and noble city is especially dear to him—owes to your constant and intelligent efforts for the advancement of true civilization and improvement, as distinguished from all that innovators, uninfluenced by the spirit of religion, vainly boast as such. Specially, our Holy Father has been pleased by the energy, tact, and truly well-directed zeal, with which you have succeeded in bringing to a satisfactory conclusion the thorny and difficult business of the Spighi property, on which all the welfare of our well-beloved Sisters in Christ the Augustines of St. Barnaba so greatly depends. The lady superior of that well-deserving house is, as you are aware, the sister of his Eminence the Cardinal Lattoli; and so signal a service rendered in that direction is, as I need hardly tell your lordship, not likely to be forgotten.

“It is under these circumstances that I have the great satisfaction of having it in my power to inform your lordship, that it is the gracious purpose of our Holy Father to mark his approbation and satisfaction at the conduct of your illustrious lordship in this matter, in a manner that, while it manifests to the whole world the care of his Holiness for every portion of the dominions of the Holy Church, will, I doubt not, be highly gratifying to yourself at the present time, and will redound to the future glory and distinction of your noble family. It is, in a word, the intention of the Holy Father to confer on your lordship the Grand Cross of the Most Noble Order of the Santo Spirito. And it is further the benignant purpose and wish of his Holiness to present you with this most honourable mark of his approbation with his own sovereign hand.

• “We may therefore hope—myself and your numerous other friends in this city—to see you here before long. Doubtless the tidings, which I have been anxious to be the first to give you, will be very shortly communicated to you in a more official manner. I fancy, indeed, that I shall not have been able to be much beforehand with the official announcement. Make your arrangements, then, I beseech you, to give us as long a visit as you can steal from the grave cares of watching over the interests of your beloved Ravenna. There are many here who are anxious to renew their acquaintance, and, if he will permit them to say so, their friendship with the Marchese di Castelmare. And, if I may venture to do so, my dear friend, I would, before closing my letter, whisper that, with due care and a little activity, the present favour of our Holy Father may be but the earnest of other things.

“The future, however, is in God’s hands, and man is but as grass. Nevertheless, as far as it is permissible to judge of the human agencies by which the Heavenly Providence brings about its ends, I should say that your Legate, his Eminence the Cardinal Marliani, was, of all the present Fathers of the Church, one of the most deserving of our regards and respect. Should you have a fitting opportunity of allowing his Eminence to become aware how strongly such have always been my sentiments, and how unceasingly I endeavour to impress them on others, I should esteem it as a favour. It is well that merit even so exalted as his should know that it is appreciated.

“Omit not, my friend, to offer to the Marchese Ludovico, your nephew, the expression of my most distinguished regard and respect; and believe me, *Illus*°

Signor Marchese, of your Excellency the devoted friend  
and most obedient servant,

“GIUSEPPE PATERINI.”

Before the Marchese had read the wordy epistle of his correspondent half through, he raised himself briskly to an upright sitting posture in his bed, his head was lifted with a proud movement from its drooping attitude, and an expression of gratified pride and pleasure came into his eyes. The much-coveted distinction which was now, he was told, to be his, had long been the object of his eager ambition. And the manner in which it was to be conferred on him—the attitude he should stand in with reference to his friend the Cardinal Legate—all contributed to make the occasion gratifying to him.

He rang his bell sharply for his servant, and said he would get up at once.

The valet said that there was a servant from the Legate's palace below, with a letter for the Marchese from the Cardinal—that, fearing his master was not well, and might be getting a little sleep, he, the valet, had been unwilling to bring the letter up; but that the man was waiting his Excellency's pleasure, as he had been ordered to ask for an answer.

Doubtless this was the official communication of which Paterini spoke, or the forerunner of it. The Marchese desired his man to bring him the Cardinal's letter directly.

Yes; the pleasant duty having fallen to the lot of the Cardinal of making a communication to the Marchese, which would doubtless be highly gratifying to him, his Eminence was anxious to seize the earliest

opportunity of performing so agreeable a task; and would be happy to see the Marchese at one o'clock that day, if that hour suited his lordship's convenience.

"Delighted to have the honour of waiting on his Eminence at the hour named."

The Marchese put the two letters on his toilet-table, and proceeded to dress. They were large letters. That from Monsieur Paterini was written on a sheet of foolscap paper, and addressed in a large strong hand, with the word RAVENNA in letters half an inch high. That from the Cardinal was contained in a large square envelope, sealed with a huge seal bearing his Eminence's arms under a Cardinal's hat, with its long many-tailed tassels hanging down on either side.

What a triumph would be this journey to Rome. What a yet greater triumph the return from it. The Legate would certainly hold a special state reception to welcome him back, and give him an opportunity of showing the new order to all his fellow-citizens. What a proud hour it would be.

The Marchese was indulging in these thoughts, dressing himself the while, and looking every now and then at the two letters lying on his table, when a footman tapped at the door and handed to the valet, who was attending on his master, yet a third epistle. Unlike the Cardinal's servant, the man who had brought it had simply left it, and gone away without saying anything about an answer.

This third letter did not resemble its two predecessors—at least on the outside—at all. It was a very little letter; not a quarter of the size of either of the others; and the seal wherewith it was sealed was not a tenth of the size of that of his Eminence; also,



instead of being white like the Cardinal's, or whity-yellow like the Prelate's, it was rose-coloured, and delicately perfumed. And the superscription, "All' Illm<sup>mo</sup> Sig<sup>r</sup> il Sig<sup>r</sup> Marchese Lamberto di Castelmare," was written in very daintily pretty and delicate small characters; as unmistakably feminine a letter as ever a gentleman received.

The Marchese's face changed visibly as the little missive was put into his hands. Yet he opened it eagerly, and opened his nostrils to the perfume, which exhaled from it, with a greedily sensuous seeming of pleasure.

This letter ran as follows:—

"DEAREST AND BEST,—If you were not indeed and indeed so to me, could I have ever suffered the vow that binds us mutually to each other to have been uttered?—Dearest and best, I write mainly, I think, for the mere pleasure of addressing you. For I am sure that it is not necessary to ask you to come to me. You can guess how eagerly I wish to—speak to you; to hear from you that you have dismissed for ever those horrid thoughts that you vexed me with at the theatre last night. I longed so to have sung the words I had to utter for your ears—to your ears only: '*Amo il zeffiro, perchè ad esso il tuo nome confido.*' Ah, Lamberto, if you knew how true that is. It is often—how often—the singer's duty to utter on the stage the words of passion. But what a thing it is—a thing I never dreamed before—to feel them as I utter them. The opera did not go badly, did it? I think the success was a legitimate one. But what is any success or any applause now to me, save yours? I felt that I was

singing to one only, as one only was in my heart and in my thoughts. Do not let many hours pass before you come to me, my love, my lord! For they go very slowly and heavily, these hours; and as I trace the movement of the tardy hour-hand on the clock, I grow sick with longing, and with hope deferred. Come to me, my dearest and my best. Your own

"BIANCA."

"P.S.—I have mentioned our engagement to no soul save my father; of course you did not wish me to exclude him from our confidence. He is fully worthy of it."

The Marchese sunk down into the chair that stood before his toilet-table, with the little letter in his hand; and his hand shook, and his eyes were dizzy, and there was a buzzy ringing in his ears. And still the perfume from the pink paper rose to his nostrils, and seemed to his fancy as though it were a poison that he had neither the power nor the will to defend himself from.

He had put the little pink note down on the table where the two other letters were, and sat looking at the three. They were manifestly, fatally incompatible. Either the two big letters must be thrown to the winds—they and their contents for ever—together with all thought of honours, high social standing, and admiring respect of the world; or the little pink note must be crushed at once and for ever, and its writer—ah!—made to understand, to begin with, that the Marchese di Castelmare did not know his own mind; that his offer and his plighted word were not to be trusted.

The letters lying there on the table before him, as he sat gazing at them almost without the power of anything that merited to be called thought, represented themselves to his fancy as living agencies of contrasted qualities and powers. The two large missives from his ecclesiastical friends were creditable and useful steeds; harmless, wholesome in blood and nature, big and pacific, apt for service, and good for drawing him on to honour, success, and prosperity. The little pink note was a scorpion with a power a thousandfold greater, for its size—a sharp, venomous, noxious power, stinging to the death, yet imparting with its sting a terrible, a fatal delight, an acrid fierce pleasure, which once tasted could not by any mortal strength of resolution be dashed away from the lips.

He took the sweet-scented little paper in his hand and read it through again. And his veins seemed to run with fire as he read. Then for the first time he saw the postscript. It had escaped his notice before.

That old man had been informed that he had offered marriage to the girl he called his daughter and had been accepted.

It might not be so easy to crush the little pink scorpion note, and liberate himself from the writer of it. Proof? There might be no legal evidence to show that he had ever made such a promise. Yet, to have such an assertion made by Bianca and her father,—to have to deny the fact, knowing it to be true!—he, Lamberto di Castelmare! Great God! what was before him?

Then there was that woman, the servant, too. Might it not well be that she, too, knew the promise he had made; overheard him possibly; set to do so—

likely enough! What was he to do?—what was he to do?

Something he must do quickly. The Cardinal Legate was expecting him at one o'clock, and—would it be best to drive Bianca from his mind till afterwards? Go to her he must in the course of the day!

Then, suddenly as a lightning-flash, he saw her before him as he had gazed on her at the theatre overnight in her white night-dress, uttering those words of passionate love—love which she told him was all addressed to him,—which she was pining to speak to him again.

*That*, then, it was in his power to have, and to have *now*,—now at once. “Ahi, ahi!” he gnashed, through his ground teeth, closing his eyes as the besieging vision postured itself in every seductive guise before the suggestions of his fancy. Ah, God! what were Cardinals, and Crosses, and place and station, or all the world beside, to one half-hour in those arms?

Come what come might, he would see her first before going to the Cardinal.

Snatching his hat, cane, and gloves, breakfastless as he was, he hurried out of the house half mad with the passion that was consuming him, yet with enough of the old thoughts about him to turn away, on quitting his own door, from the direction of the Porta Sisi, and to seek the goal of his thoughts by the most unfrequented route he could find.

---

## CHAPTER V.

Bianca at Home.

QUINTO LALLI and Bianca were sitting together in the parlour of their apartments in the Strada di Porta Sisi, that same Monday morning just after the little pink note had been despatched to the Marchese. Bianca was having her breakfast—a small quantity of black coffee in a drinking-glass, brought, together with a roll of dry bread, from the café. Old Lalli was not partaking of her repast, having previously enjoyed a similar meal, with the addition of a modicum of some horrible alcoholic mixture, called “rhume,” poured into the coffee at the café in the next street.

“That will bring him fast enough,” said the old man, alluding to the note which had been just despatched. “The game is quite in your own hands, as I told you from the beginning it would be. That postscript was a capital thought.”

The postscript in question, which, it may be remembered, had not added to the pleasure the billet had given the Marchese, had been added at the suggestion of old Lalli himself.

“I would rather not have written it,” replied Bianca, peevishly. “It looked too much like putting the screw on—I don’t like it.”

“Be reasonable, *bambina mia*, whatever you are. How, in the name of all the Saints, do you imagine that you are to become Marchesa di Castelmare without putting the screw on—and that pretty sharply too?

The man is as thoroughly caught as ever man was caught by a woman; and I tell you, therefore, that the game is in your own hands. But you don't suppose that he is burningly eager to solicit the honour of your alliance, *che diavole?*?"

"Don't, Quinto; don't go on in that way. I tell you I hate it all," returned Bianca.

"*Cara mia*, you are in an irrational humour this morning. Do you like the old game better? It don't pay, *bambina mia*, as you have found out; and, above all, it won't last. But I am sure you have reason to be satisfied with your success this season in any way. I never heard you sing better in my life than you did last night; and, to say the truth, these people seemed to appreciate it."

"I tell you, I hate it all—all—all!" said Bianca, as she swallowed the last drop of her coffee, and threw herself on the sofa in an attitude of languor and ennui.

"You are unreasonable, Bianca,—you are not like yourself this morning; I don't know what is come to you. What in the world *do* you like, or what do you want?" said the old man, looking at her with a puzzled air.

"Did you see the Marchese Ludovico in a box on the right-hand side on the second tier with that Venetian girl, the artist?"

"The Marchese Ludovico was in the left-hand stage-box with his uncle."

"Of course he was; but I mean between the acts. I saw him from the wing by the side of that girl with her face the colour of mahogany, and her half-alive

look. I hate the look of her, and I know she hates me!"

Old Quinto looked at his pupil curiously for a minute before he replied to her.

"What *do* you mean, Bianca mia?" he said, at last; "and what, in the name of all the Saints, is the Venetian girl to you, or you to her? Did you ever speak to her? Why should she hate you?"

"I tell you, she does. We women can always see those things without needing to be told them; and she knows, you may be very sure, that I hate her."

"But why? What is she to you?" reiterated the old man.

"You asked me, just now, what I wanted. I want, if you must know, what I can never have—what the Venetian girl last night was getting."

"And what was she getting? I don't understand you, upon my soul!" said Quinto, staring at her, and utterly puzzled.

"What was she getting? Love!—that was what she was getting! Ludovico loves her," said Bianca, raising herself on her elbow, and speaking with fierce bitterness.

"Tu, tu, tu, tu, tu!" whistled Quinto, between his pursed-up lips. "But I thought, *bambina mia*, that you were going to love the Marchese Lamberto, and be a good wife to him, and all the rest of it, according to the rules and practices of the best-regulated domestic family circles; and I—I was so rejoiced to hear it," said the old reprobate, casting up his eyes and hands.

"Don't, Quinto; don't talk in that manner, or you'll drive me beyond myself. I can't bear it."

"But did you not say that you loved the Marchese

Lamberto?" persisted Quinto, dropping his mocking tone, however.

"I said that I liked him better than any of the men I have known; that I admired him as a fine and noble gentleman; that I would be a good and true wife to him,—and should love him," she added, with a burst of bitterness, "better than he ever will, or can, love me."

"Well, come now, *bambina mia*. If you think that the Marchese is not enough in love with you, you must have a strong appetite, indeed, and be very hard to content. Why, if there ever was a man thoroughly caught, fascinated——"

"Bah! Love! Ludovico loves the Venetian," said Bianca, with an expressive emphasis on the verb.

"Ludovico, again! I protest I don't understand you, Bianca. But there, when a man has come to my age he don't expect ever to understand a woman. You did not want Ludovico, as you call him, to love you, did you?"

"No: but——"

And Bianca stopped short, and seemed to fall into a sort of reverie.

"But what? If you mean that you wanted to have the uncle for a husband, and the nephew for a lover, that is intelligible enough. The game would have been a dangerous one. But there is no reason why you should not say it plainly between friends."

"I tell you, Quinto, I won't hear you speak to me in that tone," said Bianca, turning on him fiercely, and with flashing eyes. "Did I ever do anything to attract him?" she added,—“did I try to make him love me? Do you think that the Venetian would have



stood in the way if I had chosen to do so? I never did! I meant, if the Marchese would make me his wife, to be true and loyal to him; though he himself seems to think it impossible that I should be so. You know that I have never attempted to attract Ludovico in any way."

"Very well then; let his Venetian have him in peace," said Quinto, shrugging his shoulders.

"Why, then, does that girl hate me as she does? What harm have I ever done her?" returned Bianca.

"Why should you think she does hate you?" expostulated Quinto.

"I have told you that I saw it. I saw it in her eyes when Ludovico was handing me the bouquet;—which he only did because his uncle told him to do it. She would have blasted me to death with her look at that moment if she could have done it;—I have a good mind—a very good mind——"

"Be guided by me this once for the last time, as you have so often been before, *bambina mia*," said Quinto, who thought that he now understood the real state of the case; "make sure of your own game first. Make all safe with the Marchese Lamberto. When you are the Marchesa di Castelmare it will be time to take any revenge on the Venetian you please."

"Ah—h—h—h!" sighed Bianca, shaking her head with an expression of disgust; "you understand nothing about it, Quinto; you can't—of course you can't. *Già*," she continued, after a pause of thought; "yes, I could take from her, poor fool, what she has; but could I, Bianca Lalli, take it and keep it for myself? Ah me, it is weary work! You might as well go and *flaner*,

Quinto; for I must dress ready for the Marchese, in case he comes this morning."

"He'll come sure enough," said Quinto; as he prepared to leave the room.

"It's quite time, then, that I made myself ready to receive him," returned Bianca, getting up from the sofa.

"*Amo il zeffiro, perchè a lui suo nome confido,*" she sang, as she turned listlessly to go to her chamber; and despite what she had said—and said with perfect sincerity to her adopted father—it may be feared that the *suo* did not refer in the singer's mind to the Marchese Lamberto.

Quinto Lalli was in the act of shutting the sitting-room door behind him, when the outer door of the apartment opened and Ludovico appeared in the doorway. He was the very last man whom Quinto, with the ideas in his head which the above conversation with Bianca had put into it, would have wished to see there. And perhaps there was something in his manner of meeting the visitor that enabled the Marchesino to perceive that he was not just then welcome.

"A thousand pardons," he said, in an easy, careless manner, "for coming at so indiscreetly early an hour; but I could not refrain from just saying one word to the Signorina Bianca on her last night's triumph, and I shall have no opportunity of seeing her later in the day."

"Bianca," called out Quinto, re-opening the door he was closing, and putting his head back into the room, "here's the Marchese Ludovico wishes to speak to you." If the old man had not been a little bit out of humour with his adopted daughter he would probably

have found some excuse for getting rid of the inopportune visitor.

"Pray let the Signor Marchese come in," returned Bianca, turning back from the door of her bed-room, rather to the surprise of Signor Quinto;—and Ludovico passed on into the sitting-room as the old man went out and shut the outer door behind him.

Bianca, as she had said, had been about to dress to receive the Marchese Lamberto; and Ludovico thus caught her (really surprised this time) in her morning toilette. But there was nothing in her dress to prevent her from being with propriety presentable, or, indeed, to prevent her from looking very charming in her dishabille. Nevertheless, she did not intend, as we have seen, to present herself without further adornment to the Marchese Lamberto; and it was not without a certain feeling of bitterness at her heart that she said to herself, "What does it signify?" as she cast a glance at her looking-glass before stepping back into the sitting-room to receive her visitor.

"Really, Signora, I don't know how to apologize sufficiently for thus breaking in upon you," said Ludovico, coming forward to meet her; "but I could not refrain from calling to say one word of congratulation. Can you forgive me?"

"I hardly know whether I can," said Bianca, half pouting and half laughing, and looking wholly beautiful; "to be seen when they are not fit to be seen is an offence which we others, women, find it difficult to forgive, you know."

"But that is an offence which, in the nature of things, cannot be committed against the Signora Bianca Lalli," retorted Ludovico, with a low bow, half

earnest and half in fun, and a look of admiration that was entirely sincere. "But the fact is," he continued, "that I really was impatient to be the first to make you my compliments on last night's immense success, To tell you that I never heard a part sung as you sang that of Amina last night would, perhaps, appear to you to be saying little. But I do assure you the whole city is saying that there never was anything like it. It was superb! Perfect! Perhaps the praise of all Ravenna is not worth very much to one who has had that of all Italy. But, at all events, my uncle is a competent judge—and he is not an easy one. And I do assure you he was moved as I never saw him moved by music before."

"He is very good—too kind to me. He was good enough to see me to my carriage at the theatre last night; and he said some word that makes me think he purposes doing me the honour of coming here to give me the advantage of his criticism on last night's performance," said Bianca, who was anxious to let her visitor understand the desirability of avoiding being caught there by his uncle.

"Yes, I am sure he would not fail to bring his tribute of admiration this morning," returned Ludovico, carelessly; "but he will not be here yet awhile. He is an early man in general, *lo zio*; but he has not been well latterly. You must have seen yourself, Signorina, how changed he is since you have known him. I really begin to be uneasy about him. You must surely have observed how ill he is looking."

"I am so grieved to hear you say so. Of course any change must be far more evident to those who have known him all his life. But I should have said

that I had rarely or never seen so remarkably young-looking a man for his years. The Marchese happened to tell me once that he is fifty or not far from it. It seemed to me impossible to believe it," said Bianca, who understood perfectly well how and why it came to pass that the Marchese should latterly be a changed man.

"Three months ago he might have well passed for five-and-thirty; but, *per Bacco*, he looks his years now every day of them—and more, too, *il povero zio*."

"Nay, Signor Ludovico, I think your regard for your uncle makes you think him worse than he is. I thought he was looking very well at the theatre last night," replied Bianca, knowing nothing more to the purpose to say.

"At the theatre. Ah! perhaps. He was pleased and excited. I did not specially remark him last night. But, the truth is, I am not easy about him."

"I feel very much persuaded, Signor Ludovico, that you are alarming yourself unnecessarily. Your fears are excited by your affection for your uncle. I doubt whether many nephews in your position, Signor Marchese, would feel as much anxiety about the health of an uncle whose heirs they were; not that I mean, of course, Signor, to insinuate that you are dependent on your uncle," added Bianca, who felt considerable curiosity to know how matters stood in the Castelmare family in this respect.

"Faith, though, I *am* dependent on him," returned Ludovico, with the most careless frankness. "I have not a bajocco in the world but what comes to me from him. But *lo zio* is more generous than uncles

often are to their nephews who are to be their heirs. And I am in no hurry to succeed to him, I assure you."

"I am sure that would not be in your nature in any case, Signor Ludovico," returned Bianca; "but there is some excuse for those being in a hurry whose future depends on the caprice of old [people," she added, fishing for further information.

"But my future does depend upon his caprice—in one way, at all events. Suppose my uncle should take it into his head to marry, and have a family. There is nothing to prevent him. Many an older man than he by a great deal has done so. And if that were to happen, there is not a beggar in all Ravenna who is a poorer man than I should be. Only that *lo zio* is about the most unlikely man to marry in all Italy, it is a thing that might happen any day."

"Why should the Signor Marchese be so unlikely to marry? One would say, to look at him, that it was not such an unlikely thing. Suppose some designing woman were to make the attempt?"

"There does not exist the woman who could have the faintest shadow of success in such an enterprise, Signora. If you could tell how often the thing has been tried! He is seasoned, *lo zio* is. Besides, he never was a man given much to falling in love at any time of his life. I don't think he is much an admirer of the sex, to tell you the truth. No; there is no fear of *that*."

There was a silence of some minutes, and Bianca seemed to have fallen into a reverie; till, suddenly raising her eyes, which had fallen beneath their lashes,

while she had been busy with her thoughts, she said, looking up archly into Ludovico's face:

"*Your* attention, at all events, was not so fully occupied by the performance last night, Signor, but that you had plenty of thoughts and eyes at command for other matters."

"What do you mean, Signora? I am sure I was not only an attentive but a delighted listener," said he, while the tell-tale blood flushed his cheeks.

"Ah! I saw which way your glances and thoughts were wandering. We artists see more things in the *salle* than you of the world before the foot-lights think for. A very pretty little brunette, in No. 10 on the upper tier, was quite equally aware of the direction of the Marchese Ludovico's thoughts and looks."

"You might have seen not only my thoughts but me myself in the same box, Signora, if you could have continued your observations after the curtain was down. The lady you saw there is one for whom I have the highest possible regard," said Ludovico, with a very slight shade of hauteur quite foreign to his usual manner, in his tone.

It was very slightly marked, but not so slightly as to escape the notice of Bianca, who perfectly well understood it and the meaning of it.

"I dare say she well deserves it; she looks as if she did," said the Diva, with a pensive air, and a dash of melancholy in her voice. "I have often wondered," she continued, after a moment's pause, "whether you others, grand signori, ever ask yourselves, when you bestow such regards as you speak of on a poor artist—I know who she is, merely an artist

like myself—what the result to the woman so loved is likely to be?"

"Signora!" cried Ludovico, provoked, exactly as Bianca had intended he should be, into saying what he would not otherwise have allowed to escape him, "permit me to assure you that, however pertinent such speculations may be in other cases, which have doubtless fallen under your observation, they are altogether the reverse of pertinent in the present instance. The lady in question is, as you say, a poor artist; not, perhaps, as you were also kind enough to say, one quite of the same kind as yourself, neither so successful nor so celebrated"—he hastened to add as he saw a sudden paleness come over the face of the singer, and an expression sudden and rapidly repressed and effaced, of such a concentration of wrath and hatred in her eyes, that momentary as it was, pulled him up short with something very much akin to a feeling resembling fear—"an artist neither so successful nor so celebrated as the Signora Lalli, but, nevertheless, a lady whom it is the dearest wish of my heart to call my wife."

"She is indeed, then, a most fortunate and happy woman," said Bianca, who had perfectly recovered herself, with grave gentleness; "and I am sure that neither I nor any sister artist have any right to envy her her happiness. Would it seem presumption in a poor comedian to express her earnest wish that you, too, Signor Ludovico, may find your happiness in such a marriage?"

"Nay, don't speak in that tone!" said Ludovico, putting out his hand and taking hers, which she readily gave him. "I accept your good wishes,



Signora, most thankfully. I do hope and think that I—that we shall find happiness in our mutual choice. But, pray observe, Signora, that our talk has led me into confiding a secret to you, that I have, as yet, told to no living soul, and that it is important to me it should be kept secret yet awhile longer. I know I may trust you; may I not?”

“Depend on it, Signor Marchese, your secret shall be quite safe with me. But are you sure it *is* a secret? And then, do you know,” continued the Diva, resuming her air of pensive thought, “when I hear a man in your position speaking with such noble truthfulness, the converse of the thought that I angered you—very innocently, believe me—by expressing just now, comes into my head. And I ask myself, if women in such a position as the lady we speak of, are apt to take themselves to task with sufficient strictness, as to what they are giving in return for all that is offered to them.”

“I don’t quite understand your meaning, Signora,” said Ludovico, who really did not perceive the drift of his companion’s words.

“I mean that a woman, so circumstanced, ought to be very sure that she is giving her heart to the *man* who asks for it, and not to his position, not to the advantages, to the wealth he offers her. She ought to feel certain that, if all this—the advantages—the wealth were to vanish and fly away, her love would remain the same. Suppose now—it is out of the question, you tell me, but the case may be imagined all the same—suppose your uncle, the Marchese, were to marry, would the Venetian lady’s love suffer no tittle of falling off?”

The red blood rushed to Ludovico's cheeks and brow, and then came an angry gleam into his eyes. It was not that he resented the liberty which his companion took in thus speaking to him. It was not, either, that he felt indignant at the doubt cast, even hypothetically, on the purity of his Paolina's love. It was rather the unreasoning animal anger against the person who had given him pain. It was a stab to his heart, this germ of a doubt thus placed there for the first time. He was conscious of the pang, and resented it. In the next minute the hot flush passed from his face, and he became very pale.

Bianca saw, and understood it all, as perfectly as if she could have seen into his heart and brain.

"The doubt, you put before me, is so horrible an one that I could almost wish it might be put to the test you speak of. But I have no such doubt. However much your questioning may be justified by other examples, it is *not* justified in the case of Paolina. I know her; I know her heart, and the perfect truthfulness that wells up from the depths of her honest eyes."

No amount of ready histrionism was sufficient to prevent a very meaning, though momentary, sneer from passing over the beautiful face of the singer as Ludovico spoke thus. But he was too much excited by his own thoughts and words to perceive it.

"I trust that you may be right, Signor Marchese. I have no doubt that you *are* right. Believe me that I have ventured to speak as I have spoken, solely from interest in the welfare of one who has been so uniformly good and kind to me as you have. Will

you believe me, Signor Ludovico, that I would do a good deal and bear a good deal to be able to conduce to your happiness in any way?"

She put out her hand to him, as she spoke the last words, with her eyes dropped to the ground, and with a feeling of genuine shyness, that was quite surprising and puzzling to herself.

"Dear Signora, I will and do believe it with all my heart; and, in truth, I am deeply grateful to you for your good will," said Ludovico, really touched by the evident and genuine sincerity of her words.

"And now, I must ask you to leave me. I must dress myself and lose no time about it. The Marchese will be here in a minute or two. And I could not, you know, venture to receive him in the uncereemonious manner which you have been good enough to excuse."

She gave him a little sidelong look with half a laugh in her eyes, as she said the latter words; and Ludovico, putting the tips of her fingers to his lips before relinquishing her hand, bowed, and left her without saying anything further.

---

## CHAPTER VI.

## Paolina at Home.

LUDOVICO had run up in a hurry to Bianca's lodging, as has been seen, merely because it happened to be in his way, and because he had been desirous, as he told her, of paying her his compliments on the success of the preceding evening. He was hastening to pay another visit, in which his heart was far more interested, and had not intended to remain with La Lalli above five minutes. The conversation between them had extended to a greater length; and the Marchesino, eager as he was to get to the dear little room in the Via di Sta. Eufemia, would have made it still longer, had not the Diva dismissed him.

The talk between them had become far more interesting than any which he had thought likely to pass between him and the famous singer. This horrible doubt—no, not a doubt—he had not, would not, could not doubt; but this germ of a doubt deposited in his mind by the words she had spoken? Could she have had any second motive for speaking as she had done? Surely not; surely all her manner and her words showed sufficiently clearly that she was actuated by kindly feelings towards him and by no unkindly feeling towards Paolina. Yet unquestionably Paolina's instinctive prejudice against her would not have been diminished by a knowledge of what the Diva had said. Ludovico thought of the bitter and burning indignation with which his darling would have heard the expression

of the possibility of a doubt of the uncalculating purity and earnestness of her love.

Nevertheless he felt that he should have liked to talk further with Bianca on the subject; of course only to convince her of the absolute injustice of her suspicions. Still she was a woman, a fellow artist; placed in some respects in the same position in relation to the world to which he belonged, as his Paolina—in *some* respects similar; but oh, thank God, how different! Yet women understood each other in a way a man could never hope to understand them. What immediately struck Bianca, struck her naturally and instinctively in this matter of a marriage between him and the Venetian artist, was the idea that Paolina, almost as a matter of course, was at least biassed in her acceptance of his love by a consideration of the material advantages she would gain by it. It was the natural thing then, the thing *à priori* to be expected, that a girl in Paolina's position should be so influenced. Ludovico would fain have questioned and cross-questioned La Bianca, his experienced monitress, a little more on this point.

Yes, to be expected *à priori*. But when one knew Paolina; when one knew her as he knew her, was it not impossible? Could it be that Paolina, being such as he knew her in his inmost heart to be, should even adulterate her love with interested calculations? He *knew* it was not so; and yet—and yet other men had been as certain as he, and had been deceived. In short the germ of doubt had been planted in his mind. And Bianca well knew what she had been about when she planted it there.

Why had she done so? She spoke with perfect sincerity when she had told him that she would do

much and suffer much for his happiness. And yet she had knowingly placed this thorn in his heart. Why could she not let him, as Quinto Lalli had expressed it, have his Venetian in peace? She spoke truly, moreover, when she said that, married to the Marchese Lamberto, she fully purposed to make him a good and true wife; truly, when she declared to old Lalli, and also to her own heart, that she really did like and admire him much. And yet there was something in the sight of the love of Ludovico and Paolina that was bitter, odious, intolerable to her.

Ludovico hastened to the house in the Via di Santa Eufemia on quitting that in the Via di Porta Sisi, not unhappy, not even uneasy; with no recognized doubt, but with a germ of doubt in his mind.

Signora Orsola had gone out *per fare le spese*, to make the marketings for the day; and he found Paolina alone. Such a *tête-à-tête* would have been altogether contrary to all rules in the more strictly regulated circles of Italian society. And it would have been all the more, and by no means the less contrary to rule in consequence of the position in which Ludovico and Paolina stood towards each other. But the world to which Paolina belonged lives under a different code in these matters. And ever since the day in which the memorable conversation between her and her lover, which has been recorded in a former chapter, had taken place, Paolina had never felt the smallest embarrassment or even shyness in her intercourse with him. And she received him now with openly expressed rejoicing, that the chance of Orsola's absence gave them the opportunity of being for a little while alone together.

"I called at this early hour, *tesoro mio*," said Ludovico, "mainly to tell you that I have made all the necessary arrangements at St. Apollinare in Classe, and you can begin your work there as soon as you like. What a dreary place it is. To think of my little Paolina working, working away all by herself in that dismal old barn of a church out there amid the swamps!"

"Oh, I shan't be a bit afraid. I am so accustomed to work all by myself."

"No, there is nothing to be afraid of! Do you think I should let you go there alone, if there were? You will find the scaffolding all ready for you."

"Thanks, dearest, I am so much obliged to you; I should never have been able to get my task done without your help. Ah, how strange things are! To think, that that Englishman, in sending me here, should have been——"

"Should have been sending me my destined wife. Who ever in the world did me so great a service as this Signor Vilobé, who never had a thought of me in his mind."

"And if I had chanced not to be in the gallery at the Belle Arti that day," rejoined Paolina, with a shudder at the thought of what the consequences of such an absence would have been.

"You will have the great church entirely to yourself, *anima mia*," said Ludovico; "there is not a soul near the place, save the old monk, who keeps the keys, and a lay-brother, who was ill, the poor old *frate* said, when I was there. It is a dreary place, my Paolina, and I am afraid you will find your task a weary one. I fear it will be cold too."

"Oh, I don't mind that much! What is more important, is to get the job done before the hot weather comes on. They say it is so unhealthy out there, when the heat comes. What is the old *frate* like?"

"He is a very old, old man, and he looks as if fever and ague every summer and autumn had pretty nearly made an end of him. He seemed quite inclined to be civil and obliging. If he were not, you could knock him down with a tap of your maulstick, I should think, though it be wielded by such a tiny, dainty little bit of a hand," said Ludovico, lifting it to his lips between both his as he spoke. "And now tell me," he continued; "what did you think of the third act last night? Did she not sing that finale superbly?"

"Superbly,—certainly the finest singing I ever heard. But——"

"What is the 'but,' *anima mia*? I confess I thought it perfect."

"So I suppose it was. But I think that perhaps I should have had more pleasure in hearing a less magnificent singer, who was more *simpatica* to me. I can't help it, but I do not like her; and I am sure I can't tell why. I have no reason; but do you know, Ludovico mio, there was one moment when, strange as it may seem, our eyes met—hers and mine—in the theatre last night. It was just as she turned away from your box, when you had put the bouquet into her hand. She looked up, and our eyes met; and I can't tell you the strange feeling and impression that her look made upon me. And I am quite sure that, for some unaccountable reason or other, she does not like me. She looked at me—it was only half a moment—



with a sort of mocking triumph and hatred in her eyes, that quite made me shudder and turn cold.

"If it were not so entirely impossible, I should think you were jealous, my little Paolina. If I were to—what shall we say?—if I were to set out on a journey with *la Diva*, *tête-à-tête*, to travel from here to Rome, should you be jealous?"

"With *La Bianca*?"

"Yes! with *La Bianca*."

"I don't know. I don't think that I should in earnest. I know in my inmost heart, my own love, that you love me truly and entirely; I feel it, I am sure of it. But all the same, I should rather that you did not travel from here to Rome alone with *La Lalli*."

"That means that, to a certain degree, you *are* jealous, little one. Do you think I should be uneasy if you were called on to travel under the escort, for example, of our friend the Conte Leandro?"

"The Conte Leandro!" cried Paolina, laughing, "I am sure you ought to be uneasy at the bare thought of such a thing, for you know how terrible it would be to me. But is it quite the same thing, *amico mio*? *La Lalli* is indisputably a very beautiful woman; and the Conte Leandro is—the Conte Leandro. But it is not that she is beautiful. I don't know what it is. There is something about her—*ecco*, I should not the least mind now your travelling to the world's end, or being occupied in any other way, with the Contessa Violante."

"She is *not* a beautiful woman, certainly."

"She is, at all events, fifty times more pleasing-looking, as well as more attractive in every way, than

the Conte Leandro. But that is not what makes the difference. I take it, the difference is, that one feels that the Contessa Violante is good, and that nobody would get anything but good from her. I have got quite to love her myself."

"And yet you see, Paolina mia, somehow or other it came to pass that I could not love her, when I was bid to do so; and, in the place of doing that, I went and loved somebody else instead. How is that to be accounted for, eh?"

"I am sure that is more than I can guess, Ludovico."

"One thing is clear—and a very good thing it is—that Violante has no more desire to marry me than I have to marry her. As soon as ever Carnival is over, my own darling, I mean to speak definitively to my uncle, and tell him, in the first place, that he must give up all notion of a marriage between Violante and me."

"As soon as Carnival is over. Why, that will be the day after to-morrow," said Paolina, flushing all over.

"Exactly so; the day after to-morrow. But I mean only to tell him, in the first instance, that I cannot make the marriage he would have me. Then, when that is settled—and some little time allowed for him to get over his mortification, *il povero zio*—will come the announcement of the marriage I *can* make. I have quite fixed with myself to do it the day after to-morrow. But—I don't know what to make of my uncle. He is not in the least like himself. I am afraid he must be ill. I fully expected that I should have to fight all through Carnival against constant exhortations

to pay my court to the Contessa. But he has never spoken to me a word on the subject."

"Perhaps he has discovered that the lady likes the proposal no better than you do," suggested Paolina, with a wise look of child-like gravity up at her lover's face.

"No; it's not that. He never dreams of her having any will in the matter apart from that of her family. I can't make him out. There's something wrong with him. He looks a dozen years older than he did; and his habits are changed too."

"Do you think—that is—it has just come into my head—do you remember, Ludovico, what I said to you last night at the theatre about the way La Lalli sung her love verses at him?"

"La Lalli again. Why, she has fascinated you at all events. You can think of nothing else. La Lalli and *lo zio*. *Dio mio!* If you only knew him. All the *prime donne* in Europe might sing at him, or make eyes at him, or make love to him, in any manner they liked from morning till night without making any more impression on him than a hundred years, more or less, on the tomb of the Emperor Theodoric out there. No, *anima mia*, that's not it. No, *il povero zio*, I am more inclined to think that he is breaking up. It does happen, sometimes, that your men, who have never known a day's illness in their lives, break down all of a sudden in that way. Everybody in the city has been saying that he is changed and ill. But I must be off, my darling. I only came to tell you that all was in readiness for you at St. Apollinare. At least that was my excuse for coming. But now I must go and see about all sorts of things for the reception to-night. We

shall have all the world at the Palazzo to-night. And *lo zio* asked me to see to everything. *Addio, Paolina mia.* You know where my heart will be all the time. *Addio, -anima mia.*

## CHAPTER VII.

### Two Interviews.

AFTER Ludovico had passed into the sitting-room in the Via di Porta Sisi to pay his visit to Bianca, Quinto Lalli prepared to leave the house in accordance with her suggestion that he should dispose of himself out-of-doors for the present. But before going he called Gigia the maid, and said, as he stood with the door in his hand:—

“Gigià, *cara mia*, the Marchese Lamberto is coming here presently; just make use of your sharp ears to hear what passes between him and Bianca; and take heed to it, you understand, so as to be able to give an account of it afterwards if it should be needed. You need not say anything about it to *la bambina* till afterwards; I have no secrets from her, you know, and, as soon as the Marchese is gone, you may tell her that you have heard everything, and that I directed you to do so; but better to say nothing about it beforehand. *Inteso?*”

“Sì, sì, *Signor Quinto! Lasci fare a me!*”

And, with that, the careful old man went out for his walk, and it was not half-an-hour after Ludovico left the house before the Marchese made his appearance.

Bianca, now having completed her toilette, started

from her sofa, and went forward to meet him with both hands extended, and with one of her sunniest smiles.

"This is kind of you, Signor Marchese. I hoped, ah! how I hoped, that you would come. If you had not, I don't know what would have become of me. My heart was already sinking with the dreadful fear that my little note might have displeased you. But, thank God, you are here: and that is enough."

"Of course, Bianca, I came when you begged me to do so," said the Marchese, looking at her with a sort of sad wistfulness, and retaining both her hands in his. He advanced his face to kiss her, and she stooped her head so as to permit him to press his lips to her forehead.

"Was it of course, *amore mio?*" she said, with a gushing look of exquisite happiness, and a little movement towards clasping his hand, which still held hers, to her heart. "Was it of course that you should come to your own, own Bianca when she begged it? But you are looking fagged, harassed, troubled, *mio bene*: have you had anything to vex you? Henceforward, you know, all that is trouble to you is trouble to me. I shall insist on sharing your sorrows as well as your joys, Lamberto. What is it that has annoyed you, *amore mio?*"

"I have much on my mind—necessarily, Bianca mia; many things that are not pleasant to think of. Can you not guess as much?"

"I have had but one thought, *amico mio*, since I heard from your lips the dear words that told me that henceforward we should be but one; that our lives, our hopes, our fears, would be the same; that, in the

sight of God and man, you would be my husband, and I your wife. Since then, I have had but one thought, and it is one which would avail to gild all others, let them be what they might, with its brightness. Is the same thought as sweet a source of happiness to you, my promised husband?"

"That's clear enough, I hope," thought Gigia, outside the door, to herself. "*Che!* If nothing had been said the other day, that would be enough; and I think Quinto might trust *nostra bambina* to manage her own affairs. She knows what she is about, the dear child: not but that it is a good plan to be able to remind a gentleman in case he should forget. Gentlemen will forget such things sometimes."

"You cannot doubt my love," said the Marchese, in reply to her appeal.

Those five words may possibly, in the course of the world's history, have occurred before in the same combination. But the phrase served the occasion as well as if it had been entirely new and original.

"Indeed, I do not, Lamberto; nor will you again, I trust, ever doubt mine as you seemed to do last night. Ah, Lamberto! you do not know how bitterly I wept over the remembrance of those cruel words when I had parted from you. You will never, never, say such again. Tell me you never will."

"Doubts and fears, my Bianca, are the inevitable companions of such a love as mine," said the Marchese, with a somewhat sickly smile; "but the few words you said last night sufficed to dissipate them, as I assured you."

"But there is still something troubling your mind, Lamberto. See, I already take the wifely privilege

you have given me to wish to share all that annoys you. What is it? Come and sit by me here on the sofa, and tell me all about it."

And then the Marchese sat himself in the seat of danger that had been proposed to him, and, in a certain degree, explained to Bianca the difficulties attending a marriage with her. He tried hard to recommend to her favourable consideration the plan of a secret marriage—of a marriage to be kept secret, at all events, for awhile for the present; but such an arrangement, as may easily be understood, did not, in Bianca's view, meet the requirements of the case. That was not what she wanted. It may also be easily understood that the Marchese, occupying the position which the enemy had assigned to him, carried on the contest at an overpowering disadvantage, and was finally routed, utterly conquered, and yielded at discretion.

On her side the advantages of the situation were made the most of with the most consummate generalship. The limit between that which was permitted to him, and that which was denied to him, was drawn with a firmness and judgment admirably conducive to the attainment of the end in view. He was permitted to encircle the slender, yielding waist with one arm as he sat by her side on the sofa, and to retain possession of her hand with the other; but any advanced movement from this base of operations was firmly and unhesitatingly repressed. At one moment, when the attacking party seemed to be on the point of pressing his advances with more vigour than before, it chanced that the Diva coughed; and it so happened that, in the next instant, Gigia entered the room, bringing wood for the fire in her arms—a diversion which, of course,

involved the execution of a hurried movement of retreat on the part of the enemy.

The whole of Bianca's tactics, indeed, were admirable. And the result was, as usual, victory. Once again, as long as he was in her presence and by her side, the unfortunate Marchese felt that the spell was irresistible—absolutely irresistible by any force of volition that he was able to oppose to it. Once again it seemed to him that the only thing in the world that it was utterly impossible to him to relinquish was the possession of Bianca. The hot fit of his fever was on him in all its intensity; and there was nothing that he could do, or suffer, or undergo that he would not rather do, or suffer, or undergo than admit the thought of giving her up. It really seemed as if there were some physical emanation from her person—some magnetic stream—some distillation from the nervous system of one organization mysteriously potent over the nervous system of another, which mounted to his brain, mastered the sources of his volition, and drew him helpless after her, as helplessly as the magnetized patient obeys the will of his magnetizer.

Suddenly both of them heard one o'clock strike from the neighbouring church. To the Marchese it was a knell which, with horrid warning-note, dragged him forcibly back from his Circean dalliance to the thoughts, the things, and the people whose incompatibility with the possibility of such dalliance was driving him mad. It was the hour at which he had promised to wait upon the Cardinal. It was absolutely necessary that he should go at once; and he tore himself away from that fatal sofa-seat with a wrench, and a reflection on the purpose of his visit to the Legate,



which seemed to him really to threaten to disturb his reason.

Slinkingly he stole from the house in the Strada di Porta Sisi, and hurried to the Cardinal's palace. His mind seemed to reel, and a cold sweat broke out all over him as he rang the bell at the top of the great stone stair of the Legate's dwelling.

This business that he was now here for—those high honours which were about to be lavished upon him—would they not all make his position so much the worse? The higher he stood, would not his fall be the more terrible? What would be said or thought of him? At Rome, immediately after the high distinction shown him, what would they not say? Here, in Ravenna, how should he look his fellow-citizens in the face? Impossible, impossible. Could he venture even to accept the high distinction offered to him? Would there not be something dishonourable—a sort of treachery in suffering this mark of the Holy Father's special favour to be bestowed upon him, while he was meditating to do that which, if his intention were known, would make it quite impossible that any such honour should be conferred on him?

And how fair was life before him, as it would be if only this fatal woman had never crossed his path? And was it not even yet in his own power to make it equally fair again? Was it not sufficient for him to *will* that it should be so?

What if he never saw Bianca again? What could avail any nonsense she or her pretended father might talk of HIM? If they were to declare on the house-tops that he had promised marriage to La Lalli, what human being in all the city would believe them? The

very notion that such a thing could be possible would be treated as the impudent invention of people who clearly had not the smallest knowledge of the man they were attempting to practise on. No, he had but to will it to be free. If only he could *will* it.

And with these thoughts passing through his mind he entered the receiving-room of the Legate.

It was impossible to be received more cordially than he was by that high dignitary. His Eminence felt sure that his old acquaintance and highly-valued good friend the Marchese was aware how great his (the Cardinal's) pleasure had been in discharging the duty that had devolved upon him. The letter he had that morning received from the Cardinal Secretary was a most flattering one. Perhaps he (the Cardinal) might take some credit to himself for having performed a friend's part, as was natural, in keeping them at Rome well acquainted with the singular merits of the Marchese. He would, indeed, have been neglecting his duty if he had done otherwise.

Then, after alluding lightly and gracefully to the special interest he could not but feel, in his private capacity, in any honour which tended yet more highly to distinguish a family with which he trusted his own might at no distant day be allied, he told the Marchese that it was probable that nothing would be done in the matter till after Easter.

It was the gracious wish of the Holy Father to enhance the honour bestowed by conferring it with his own apostolic hand; and, doubtless, as soon as Lent should be over, it would be intimated to the Marchese that the Holy Father was desirous of seeing him at

two ancient columns in the Piazza Maggiore would be an excellent site—in the background.

Ah! if only he could have had the courage to run away from temptation.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A Carnival Reception.

ON that Monday night all the world of Ravenna were assembled in the suite of state-rooms on the *piano nobile* of the Palazzo di Castelmare. The cards of invitation had announced that masks would be welcomed by the noble host; and a large number of the younger portion of the society accordingly presented themselves in dominoes and the silk half-masks which are usually worn in conjunction with them. But very few of either ladies or gentlemen came in character. Such costumes were mostly reserved for the ball, which was to take place at the Circolo dei Nobili on the following evening. That was of course *the* wind-up of the Carnival; and besides it was felt, that a shade or two more of licence and of the ascendancy of the Lord of Misrule might fitly be permissible at the Circolo, than was quite *de mise* in the rooms of so grave and reverend a Signor as the Marchese Lamberto di Castelmare.

A few determined revellers would lose no opportunity of enjoying the delight of dressing themselves up in costumes, which they deemed specially adapted to show off to advantage either their physical perfections or their intellectual and social pretensions. Sometimes, as may have been observed by those who

have witnessed such revelries, it unfortunately happens that both the above desirable results are not quite compatible. Our friend the Conte Leandro, for instance, having determined to appear at the Circolo ball in the character of Dante—which, for a poet at Ravenna, was a very proper and natural selection—presented himself at the Palazzo Castelmare in that of Apollo—an equally well-imagined presentation; had it not been that the happy intellectual analogy was less striking to the vulgar eye, than the remarkable exhibition of knock-knees and bow-legs resulting from the use of the “fleshings,” which constituted an indispensable portion of the god’s attire.

He carried in one hand what had very much the appearance of a gilt gridiron; but was intended to represent a lyre; and in the other a paper, which was soon known to contain a poem of congratulation addressed to the host, on the announcement which, all the city well knew by this time, had been made to him that morning.

The rooms were thronged with black dominoes, and white dominoes, and pink, and scarlet, and blue, and particoloured dominoes. Violante was there in a black domino, and Bianca in a white one. There was very little dancing, but plenty of chattering and laughing. One main thing to be done by every person there was to congratulate the host on his new honours. Our Conte Apollo, among the rest, would fain have read his poem on the occasion. But as he approached the Marchese for the purpose, a white silk domino, that was standing by the Marchese’s side, burst into such an uncontrollable fit of silvery and most musical, but too evidently uncomplimentary laughter, that the

poor god of song was too abashed by it to make head against it.

"Surely never had Apollo such a representative before," said the Marchese to his companion, as the mortified god turned away.

"The voice, the face, the lyre, and the legs; oh, the legs!" said the silvery voice of the white domino in return.

The words of both speakers had been uttered *sotto voce*; but the Conte Leandro had unfortunately sharp ears; and not only heard what was said, but was at no loss to recognize the voice of the second speaker.

The poor poet was destined not to find the evening an agreeable one. A little later he was passing by an ottoman in one of the less crowded rooms, on which the Marchese Ludovico was sitting with the Contessa Violante. She had, at an early period of the evening, abandoned all pretence of keeping up her incognito, and was dangling her black mask from her finger by its string as she sat talking to Ludovico. Leandro turned towards them to pay his compliments to the Contessa, and possibly in the hope of being allowed to read his copy of verses. But here again mortification awaited him.

"What, Æsop, Leandro! What put it into your head to choose the old story-teller for a model? You look the part to perfection, it is true; but what is that thing you have got in your hand?"

Again his lordship was fain to retreat.

"What a shame to torment the poor man so, in your own house too, Signor Ludovico," said Violante, who, nevertheless, could not help laughing.

"Not a bit, he's used to it. He is too absurd for anything; an egregious vain ass," returned Ludovico, with very little precaution to prevent the object of his animadversions from hearing them. And again Leandro's acute ears did him the ill service of carrying every word that had been said to his understanding.

"Indeed I think her perfectly charming," said Violante, in continuation of the conversation, which had been interrupted by the bow-legged vision of Apollo; "extremely pretty of course, but a great deal more than that. She is fresh, ingenuous, modest, full of sensibility, and as honest-hearted as the day. You are a very fortunate man, Signor Ludovico, to have succeeded in winning such a heart."

"How came it about at first, that you spoke to her?" asked Ludovico.

"Oh, I went into the chapel in the morning, as I very often do, to recite the litany of the Virgin, and if she had remained on her scaffolding I should probably not have noticed her. But she ran down in the most obliging manner, fearing that she might disturb me, and offering to suspend her work, as long as I should remain at my devotions. It was so pretty of her, and so prettily said!"

"And then you answered her as prettily, I suppose, Signora?"

"Nay, it is not in my power to do that," said Violante, with a touch of bitterness; "but I told her, that she did not disturb me in the least; and I spoke to her of the work she was engaged on; and she asked me to come up and look at it; and so we talked on till we became very good friends."

"And then you were kind enough to converse with her on several subsequent occasions?"

"Oh, yes, we had several long talks; and I liked her so much. I am sure she is thoroughly good. I rejoice with all my heart that a destiny, so much more brilliant than anything that could have been expected for her, is likely to be hers."

"I wish, Signora Contessa, that it was *more* than likely to be hers; I wish that our path lay clearer before us!" said Ludovico, with a sigh.

"Including me in the 'us'? I wish it were with all my heart. But remember, Signor Marchese, how much is possible to a man, and how little to a woman. All, that the strong expression of my own wishes and feelings can do, shall be done when the proper time comes for the doing of it. But you must not trust to that, or to me. You ought to save me from being compelled to act at all in the matter. *You* are free to speak. And now that another besides me is so vitally concerned, I think you ought to do so without further delay."

"And I have fully made up my mind to do it, Signora Contessa. I have told Paolina, this very day, that I purpose speaking very seriously to my uncle on the subject on the day after to-morrow—the first day in Lent. I thought I would let this Carnival time pass by first without breaking in upon it, with business that cannot, I fear, be otherwise than painful. I have promised Paolina, and am fully determined to speak to my uncle on Wednesday."

"And what do you purpose saying to him?" asked Violante, looking into his face with quiet eyes.

"In the first instance I have no intention of speaking to him on the subject of Paolina——"

"No!" interrupted the Contessa, changing her look to one of surprise.

"Not to begin with, I think. To speak of my intention to make a marriage, which I cannot hope will meet his approbation, would only make my rejection of the alliance, which he hopes to see me form, the more difficult."

"Yes, that seems true; but I doubt whether you are right there. You will begin, then, by telling him——?"

"I shall begin by saying that it seems clear to me, that I have little hope of any success in the quarter in which he has wished me to——"

"Nay, that will not be quite fair, Signor Marchese," interrupted Violante, speaking very quietly. "Can you honestly tell your uncle that you have made any very strenuous efforts in that direction?"

"But I thought, Signorina," said Ludovico, hastily;—"I surely had reason to suppose that I should be speaking in support of your sentiments quite as much as——"

"Stay, Signor Marchese; excuse my interrupting you, but it is exactly on this point that I wished to talk with you. Let us clearly understand each other. It is, no doubt, quite true that if you and I had been left to ourselves, if no family considerations had intervened to suggest other views, neither of us would have been led by our own inclinations,—it is best to speak openly and frankly,—neither of us, I say, would have been led by our own inclinations to think more of the



other than as an old and valued acquaintance. This is the truth, is it not?"

"Nay, Signorina, you are now hardly fair; how can I say——"

"It is not fair, you would say," interrupted Violante again, "that I should force your gallantry to make so painful an avowal. Nonsense! Let us put aside all such trash: the question is, not how we shall mutually make what the circumstances require us to say to each other agreeable to the self-love of either of us, and to silly rules of conventional gallantry, but there is a real question of fairness between us; and it is this: how much should each of us expect that the other will contribute towards the difficult task of liberating both of us from engagements we neither of us wish to undertake. You see, Signor Marchese, I have made up my mind to speak clearly; more clearly than I could, I think, have ventured to do, had I not the advantage of having had those conversations with my friend Paolina in the Cardinal's chapel."

"In what respect did it seem to you, that what I proposed saying to my uncle in the first instance, was unfair, Signorina?"

"In this it would be unfair. To talk of your want of success in obtaining what you never sought to obtain, is simply to throw on me the burden and the blame of disappointing the wishes and plans of both our families. I am ready to do my part; but it would be unreasonable to expect that it can be so active or so large a part as your own. It will *not* be for you to let it be supposed that you are ready and willing to offer your hand to the Contessa Violante Marliani, trusting to my refusal to accept it in the teeth of the

wishes of my family. It is your duty to say openly and plainly that *you* cannot make the marriage proposed to you. If I were in your place—if I might venture to suggest, what I would myself counsel—I should add, as a reason—an additional reason—that I had given my heart elsewhere.”

“But, Signora, you forget that the marriage between us was proposed before I ever saw or heard of Paolina,” said Ludovico, with a *naïveté* that should certainly have satisfied his companion that he was no longer attempting to shape his discourse according to the rules of conventional gallantry.

Violante, despite her gravity, could not forbear smiling, as she said in reply:

“Not at all, Signor. I do not in the least forget that before Paolina ever came to Ravenna, you were no whit better disposed to second the wishes of our families.”

“Nay, Signorina. I declare——”

“What, again! Do let us leave all such talk. Don’t you see that we may frankly shake hands on it. Don’t you see that any pain that your indifference might have occasioned is entirely salved by the consciousness that I have been as bad as you. We are equally rebels against the destiny arranged for us. Let us fight the battle together then. I think that you would act wisely in telling your uncle at once that it is impossible you should make any other woman your wife than her who has your entire heart and affection. I think that this course is due to Paolina also.”

“I only wished to spare my uncle, as much as

possible, in breaking to him what I know will give him pain."

"People, who will wish what they ought not to wish, must endure the pain that the frustration of such wishes entails. It is certainly your right to marry according to your own inclinations."

"Yes; and in truth, as far as real power goes, there is nothing to prevent my doing so. It is truly a desire to break to my uncle, as gently as I can, that which will certainly be a blow to him. He is not well, my uncle. He is deplorably changed since the beginning of this year. Look at him, as he passes us," he added, as he observed the Marchese Lamberto approaching the place where they were sitting, with the white satin domino on his arm.

"He is looking changed and ill, certainly," said Violante, when the Marchese had passed, apparently without noticing them; "he looks thin and worn, and yet feverish and excited. Who is the lady on his arm? She must be very tall."

Many of the assembled company had by this time, like the Contessa Violante, discarded their masks, finding the heat, which always results from the use of them, oppressive, and not perceiving that any further amusement was to be got by retaining them. But the white domino, leaning on the Marchese's arm, still retained hers. It is not likely that Bianca herself could have had any objection to its being seen by all Ravenna that she monopolized the attention of the Marchese during the entire evening. And it is therefore probable that she had retained her disguise in compliance with some hint given to that effect by the Marchese Lamberto.

"I take it it must be La Lalli, the *prima donna*. I know she is here to-night and in a white domino, though I have not yet spoken to her. I am afraid my uncle must be tired and bored with her. He always makes a point of showing those people attention; and besides he had so much to do with bringing her here. I dare say we shall hear her once or twice again in this house before she leaves Ravenna. My uncle is fond of getting up some good music in Lent, when he can."

"The Marchese Lamberto did not look to me as if he was tired or bored," said Violante, thoughtfully.

"I hope he is not. Here comes that absurd animal Leandro again. Did you ever see anything so outrageously ridiculous?"

Ludovico and the Contessa then rose from their seats, and Violante taking his arm drew him in the direction in which the Marchese Lamberto had led the white satin domino.

---

## CHAPTER IX.

*Paolina's Return to the City.*

THERE remained now but one day more of that Carnival, which remained memorable for many years afterwards in Ravenna, for the terrible catastrophe that marked its conclusion.

All that these people, whose passions, and hopes, and fears have been laid open to the reader, were doing during those Carnival weeks was gradually leading up, after the manner of human acts, to the terrible event which rounded off the action with such fatal completeness. And the catastrophe was now at hand.

During the reception at the Castelmare palace on that night of the last day of Carnival but one, the white domino, whom Ludovico had rightly supposed to be Bianca—a guess which had been shared by many other persons in the room—had pretty exclusively occupied the attention of the Marchese Lamberto. And it must be supposed that the resolution was then taken between them which led to the summons of Signor Fortini, the family lawyer, to the palazzo on the first day of Lent, as was related in the first book of this narrative. It was on the morning of Ash Wednesday, it will be remembered, that the lawyer had received from the Marchese the formal communication of his intention to marry the Signorina Bianca Lalli.

The reader knows, also, that what took place in

the interval between the night of the reception at the Palazzo Castelmare and the morning of the first day in Lent was not calculated, as might have been supposed, to assist in bringing the mind of the Marchese to a final determination to that effect. The terrible degree to which his jealousy and anger had been excited on the night of the ball at the Circolo by Ludovico and Bianca will also not have been forgotten. The conduct which had awakened that jealousy was, in a great measure, if not entirely, innocent on the part of both the offenders, as the reader will also, no doubt, remember. The similarity of the costume adopted by the Marchesino and Bianca was entirely accidental. And this, trifling as the circumstance may seem, had contributed very materially to arouse the Marchese's wrath and jealous agony. Bianca, perhaps, under the circumstances, ought not to have danced as frequently as she did with the Marchesino. She at least knew that the Marchese Lamberto had already conceived the most torturing jealousy of his nephew. Ludovico, on his part, was of course utterly unconscious that he was giving his uncle the remotest cause for umbrage by his attentions to the successful Diva.

Then came the little *tête-à-tête* supper—*tête-à-tête* by accident rather than by design, as the reader may remember; and the officious and spiteful eaves-dropping and tell-tale denunciation by the angry poet.

Nevertheless, and despite of all these circumstances and of the temper of mind in which he quitted the ball-room that night, it is certain that the Marchese did, on the morning of the following Ash Wednesday, send for his lawyer and announce to him formally his intention to make the Signorina Bianca Lalli his wife.

her inquiries, and started on her way. But before she had walked many steps, other thoughts began to present themselves to her mind. How did she know how far they had gone from the farmhouse? Might they not still be in the immediate neighbourhood of it? Might she not, very probably, fall in with them? And would not that be exceedingly disagreeable? Would she not have all the appearance of having followed them purposely from motives of jealousy? Would not her presence be unwelcome? Would there not be something of indelicacy even in thus following one who evidently preferred being with another?

These considerations sufficed to produce the change in her purpose, and in the direction towards which she turned her steps, that has been mentioned. So she returned by the path, which has been described, into the road, and proceeded along it on her return to the city. She did not trip along as briskly and alertly as she had done in coming thither; but walked slowly and pensively with her eyes on the ground. She was thus a good deal longer in returning than in going. And when she had reached the immediate neighbourhood of the city, she turned aside before entering the gate, into a sort of promenade under some trees near the city wall, and sat down on one of the stone benches there to think a little.

And presently, as she was busy thinking, she was startled into much displeasure against herself by discovering that two large utterly unauthorised tears were running down her cheeks.

What was the meaning of that? Surely she was not jealous still, after all the good reasons for not being

so, that she had so conclusively pointed out to herself?

No, she was not jealous. She *would* not be jealous. But it would have been so nice in the Pineta. The sun was now high in the heavens. The birds were singing on every tree; and Ludovico was enjoying it with that woman, whom, when she had seen her at the theatre, she had found it so impossible to like or to tolerate. Yet she would not, could not, doubt that Ludovico loved herself, and her only.

She dried her tears, and determined that she would not let doubts of what she really did not doubt torment her. But still she sat on and on upon the bench in the shade musing on many things—on the Contessa Violante, on the steps Ludovico had said that he would take this very first day of Lent towards the open breaking off of all engagement with that lady, and on the amount of scandal and difficulty that would thence arise.

Then her fancy, despite all her endeavours and determinations to the contrary, would go back to paint pictures of the beauty of La Bianca, as she sat by the side of Ludovico in the little carriage. How lovely she had looked, and how happy,—so evidently pleased with herself, with her companion, and with all about her. And Ludovico had seemed in such good spirits—so happy, so thoroughly contented. He did not want any one else to be with him. He was far enough from thinking of the fond and faithful heart that would have been made so happy—oh, so happy—if it had been given to *her* to sit there by his side.

She sat thinking of all these things till she was roused from her reverie by the city clocks striking



noon. It was three good hours later than she had supposed it to be; and she jumped up from her seat, intending to hasten home to Signora Orsola Steno.

All this Paolina stated partly to Signora Orsola on her return home, and partly in reply to inquiries subsequently made of her by inquirers far less easily satisfied.

But chance—or, what for want of a better designation, we are in the habit of so calling—had decreed that Signora Orsola should not be delivered from her suspense so quickly.

On turning into the shady promenade under the city walls, a little before reaching the Porta Nuova, Paolina had strolled onwards, before sitting down on one of the benches that tempted her after her walk, till she fancied that it would be shorter for her to reach the Via di Santa Eufemia by another gate, which gave admission to the city at the other end of the promenade, instead of by turning back to the Porta Nuova. And thus, though she had in truth returned to the city, the men at that gate were quite right in their statement that she had not returned by the way they guarded.

The road, however, by which Paolina proposed to return to her home led her past the residence of the Cardinal, and, as she passed, it occurred to her that it would be well, and save another walk, to look in at the chapel and put together the things she had left in it on finishing her task there, so that they might be ready for a porter to bring away when she should send for them.

For this purpose she ascended the great staircase of the Cardinal's palace, and was at once admitted to pass on into the chapel, as a matter of course, by the

servants, who had become quite used to her visits there; and, from this point forwards, the accuracy of her statements was easily proved by other testimony besides her own.

It would not have taken her long, as she had said to herself, to get her things together and make them ready for being fetched away. But in the chapel she found the Lady Violante on her knees on the fold-stool before the altar. It was the first day in Lent, and, accordingly, a period of extra devotion. The sins, the excesses, the frivolities, of the Carnival had to be atoned for by extra prayers and religious exercises; and if Violante had herself been guilty of no sins, excesses, or frivolities, during the festive season, yet there was abundant need of her prayers for those who had.

On hearing a light footfall behind her she looked round; and, on seeing Paolina, rose from her knees, and advanced a step to meet her.

"You are come to take away your things, *cara mia*. The scaffolding has already been removed. I suppose you are very glad that your task here is done; and it would be selfish, therefore, to say that I am sorry. How often it happens, Paolina, that we are tempted to wish what we ought not to wish."

"I don't think, Signorina, that I often wish what my conscience tells me I ought not to desire; and I should have thought that such a thing had never occurred to you. I wished very much to do something this morning, and I began to do it; but then I thought that I ought not to do it, and I did not."

"Then, my child, you are all the happier. It is a happy day for you."

Paolina sighed a great sigh, and dropped her eyes to the ground.

"Then I suppose the evil wish was not wholly conquered," said Violante, looking into her companion's eyes with a grave smile.

"It was this, Signora: I walked out very early this morning to St. Apollinare in Classe, where I am to make some copies of the Mosaics, which I hope to begin to-morrow. A scaffolding has been prepared for me; and I went to see that all was ready."

And then poor little Paolina was tempted to pour out all her heart and its troubles to her gravely kind and gentle friend. And Violante spoke such words of comfort as her conscience would allow her to speak in the matter. And the talk between the two girls ran on; and the minutes ran on, too. And poor old Orsola Steno, at the end of her stock of patience at last, had taken the step that has been narrated.

And thus it had come to pass that Paolina had played the truant, and that her protracted absence had led to Signor Fortini's momentary doubt as to the identity of the corpse he had seen brought into the city.

---

## BOOK V.

## WHO DID THE DEED?

## CHAPTER I.

## At the City Gate.

BIANCA LALLI lay dead at the city gate. Fresh from her triumphs, her successes, her schemes, her hopes, her frolic, at the full tide of her fame, and her matchless beauty, the poor Diva was—dead!

How she came by such sudden death there was nothing whatever in her appearance to tell—scarcely anything to tell that she *was* dead. In a quiet composed attitude stretched on her back, she lay in the light white dress she had put on for her excursion with Ludovico. With the exception of a broad blue ribbon round the waist, and another which bound her wealth of auburn hair, her entire dress was white. It was now scarcely whiter than her face. But there was on the features neither disorder nor sign of pain.

From a feeling of natural respect for death, and perhaps, also, for the extreme beauty of the young face in death, the bearers of the body had covered it with a coarse linen sheet, such as they had chanced to find to hand. But the duty of the officers of the gate would have required them to uncover the face, even if Ludovico in the first agony of his doubt had not already

done so. There, amid the pitying throng of rough men, she lay beneath the sombre old gateway vault. The extraordinary abundance of her hair fell in great loose tresses, some making rich contrast with the white dress that covered her shoulders, and some of it thrown back behind over the door on which the body lay.

A terrible and deadly sickness came over Ludovico, and his face became almost as white as that of the corpse. His head swam round; and, reeling back from the sight that met his eyes, he swooned, and would have fallen to the ground had the lawyer not caught him.

"I suppose," said Fortini, to the men who crowded round the body, while he paid attention to the Marchesino,—*"I suppose that there can be no doubt that she is dead?"*

"She's as dead as the door she lies on," said one of the men who had helped to carry the body, shaking his head gravely, as he looked pitifully down on her; "as dead as the door she lies on,—more's the pity, for she looks like one of them that find it good to live,—more's the pity,—more's the pity."

*"Che bella donna! È proprio un viso d'angiolo,"* said another; "and so young too. There's some heart somewhere that'll be sore for this."

"Pretty creature; it is enough to break one's own heart to look at her as she lies there," said a third.

While a fourth of the rough fellows stood and sobbed aloud, and let the tears run down his furrowed cheeks, without the smallest effort to control or hide his emotion. For an Italian, especially an Italian man of the people, unlike the men of the Teuton races, is never ashamed of emotion. He very often

manifests a great deal which he does not genuinely feel; but he never seeks to hide any that he does feel.

All this while the officials at the gate, some six or eight of them, standing thus round the extemporized bier, were closely questioning the men, who had been the bearers; Ludovico and the old lawyer were thus shut out from the circle which had formed itself around the body, and were on the outside of it. A boy, belonging to one of the gate officials, brought, at the lawyer's bidding, a glass of cold water, by the help of which the young Marchese was quickly restored to consciousness. He was able to rise to his feet again before the officers had concluded their official questioning of those who had brought in the body. And the lawyer looked anxiously into his face to ascertain that he was capable of understanding what was said to him, as he stood, still apparently half-stunned by the shock of the event, against the doorway of the little dwelling of the gatekeepers.

"Stand where you are and say nothing; we will go away together presently," whispered the lawyer in his ear, gripping him hard at the same time by the arm, and giving him a little shake, as if to rouse him to comprehension; a mode of speaking and acting on the part of Signor Fortini, which would have seemed very extraordinary to the young Marchese at any other time, but which he was now too much overpowered by what had happened to notice.

Signor Fortini had no official character or function, which in any way gave him the right, or made it his duty to meddle with the circumstances, that had occurred by chance in his presence. But he was so

well known to all the city, was mixed in one way or another with so many matters of business, and was so much and so generally looked up to, that the people at the gate, hardly knowing what their own duty required of them under circumstances so unusual, turned to him for directions as to what they ought to do.

"What you have to do, my good friend, is simple enough," said the lawyer, addressing the superior official at the gate; "you must, in the first place, receive and take charge of the body. You must inquire of these good folks all they have to tell you, together with their names and addresses. You must draw up a *processo verbale*, embodying all such information; and then you must have the body conveyed to the mortuary at the hospital, at the same time making your report to the police, and delivering up the body into their custody. In such a case as this, it will be well, too, that these worthy men, who have brought the body here, should go with you to the police, the more so," he added, as his quick eye marked a certain blank look in the faces of the men,—“the more so, as they must be recompensed for their trouble and labour, and it is by the police that the payment for it must be made.”

"*Un processo verbale!* Yes, one knows that; but under circumstances so strange—*grazie a Dio* so unheard of—if your worship would have the kindness to put one in the way of it. Your worship is familiar with affairs of all sorts. Just an instant.”

"We must hear first what these men have to say. First take down their names and addresses.”

The men gave them, as the lawyer remarked to himself, with perfect willingness and alacrity.

They then related that having been at work in the forest, cutting up the branches and trunk of a tree, which had fallen from old age and natural decay, they were going to another part of the Pineta, a short distance off, where another fallen tree awaited their axes and saws, when they saw a lady asleep as they thought on a bank. They were about to pass on without interfering with her in any way, when one of their party remarked that it was odd that all the noise they had made had not wakened her, for they had come along laughing, singing, and talking loudly. This had led them to approach closely to her; and then, as they looked at her, a suspicion of the truth began to come to their minds. They touched her, and found that she was dead. She was not quite cold, they said, and were quite sure of that fact. They looked at her, and looked all around to see if they could perceive any sign of the cause of her death. But they could see nothing. There was, as far as they could see, no trace of blood, either on her dress or anywhere around the spot where she lay. And then they had borrowed a door from the farm near St. Apollinare, and had brought the body here, and that was all they knew about it.

"Had they seen any other person in the forest that morning?"

"Not a soul; and they had been in that part of the Pineta, or at least at no great distance, all the morning from sunrise."

"Would they be able to find again and to know the spot on which they had found the body?" the lawyer asked.



"Oh, yes," they said, "easily. It was not by the side of any of the ordinary tracks through the forest—but not very far from one of them; as if the lady had turned aside from the path, and sought out a quiet spot to enjoy a *siesta* without being disturbed."

"It is pretty clear," said the lawyer, "that it has been a case of sudden death during sleep—probably from disease of the heart. Now, my friend," he said, turning to the senior of the officials, "you have only simply to state what we have heard in writing and carry it to the police. Meantime, it will be as well to remove the body at once. Let a couple of your people accompany the men who brought it here—they may as well carry it to the mortuary."

So a sheet was obtained from a neighbouring house, the more perfectly and decently to cover the body, preparatory to its being carried through the streets. Ludovico stepped hurriedly forward from the doorpost, against which he had been leaning, and looked eagerly once again at the calmly-tranquil and still beautiful face before they covered it with the sheet. And then the six men took up their burden, and, with two of the gate-officers marching at their head, moved off towards the hospital.

Then the lawyer put his hand on Ludovico's shoulder in a manner that was strange, and that would at once have seemed so to the Marchese had he at the time had any attention to give to such a circumstance, and said in a peremptory and authoritative sort of voice, very unlike his usual manner when speaking to a person in the social position of the Marchese,—

"Now, come with me, Signor Marchese. Let us

go. We can do no more good here." And he put his arm within that of Ludovico, as if to lead him away, as he spoke.

The Marchese suffered the old man thus to lead him from the gate without speaking a word.

"Now, Signor Marchese," said the lawyer, as soon as they had turned the corner of a street, which took them out of sight of the city gate, "now, lose no time. Make for the Porta Adriana, and quit the city by that. There is an *osteria* in the *borgo* outside the gate, where you can get a *bagarino* with a quick horse for Faenza; thence cross the mountains into Tuscany. You may easily be over the frontier this night; you have plenty of time, only none to lose. It will be at least two hours before any steps can be taken; you may be beyond Faenza by that time. Have you money about you? If not I can supply you. I have a considerable sum about me—— One word more: Do not venture to remain in Florence. The grand Ducal Government would not refuse the demand of the Nuncio in such a case; and the demand would surely be made. Better get on to Leghorn; and make for Marseilles."

"Good God, Signor Fortini! What are you talking of; and what are you dreaming of? What is it that you have got into your head?" said Ludovico, rousing himself, and stopping short in his walk to turn round and face the lawyer.

"Look here, Signor Marchese, your father was my friend and patron; your grandfather was my father's friend and patron; and, therefore, bad as this business is, I think, and will think, more of old times and old kindnesses than of what I suppose is my duty now. But don't lose time by trying to throw dust in *my*

eyes. What is the use of it? What I have got in my head is what every man, woman and child in Ravenna will have in their head before this day is over. Have you sufficient money about you?"

"Signor Fortini, once again I don't know what you are driving at. I insist upon your speaking out your entire meaning. What is it you imagine?" said Ludovico, speaking angrily, but now very pale.

"Imagine! What can I imagine? The matter is, unhappily, but too clear. Why of course I imagine that you have by some means,—which the medical people will find out fast enough, doubt it not,—killed that unfortunate woman in the Pineta."

"Signor Fortini!" exclaimed Ludovico, in a voice in which horror, indignation and dismay had equal shares.

"Marchese, how can anybody have any doubt on the matter. Alas, that I should have to say so, it is too self-evident. You persuade this poor creature to go out alone with you into the Pineta at an extraordinary hour of the morning, knowing then,—or according to your own showing, becoming aware soon after you started—that it was your uncle's intention by a marriage with this woman to destroy utterly every prospect you have in the world. What other human being can have had any ill-will against this woman, or any interest in destroying her? Your interest in doing so is of the very strongest possible kind. It was no case of robbery. The girl was put to death by some one, who had an interest in doing so. She is last seen alive with you; I find you with a singularly scared and troubled manner pretending to make inquiry respecting her, your real object

evidently being to ascertain whether the fact of the murder were yet known, and to give rise to the impression that you knew nothing of the poor woman's fate. Then, when confronted with the corpse you are seen to be absolutely overcome by your emotion. Now, as I have simply stated the facts, do you imagine that a moment's doubt will be felt as to who has done this deed?"

Ludovico felt the cold sweat break out on his forehead, as he listened to the lawyer's words. The logic of the facts did most unquestionably seem to make out a fatally strong case against him. And it was difficult to judge—very difficult even for the shrewd and practised lawyer to judge—whether the consciousness of crime, or the horror of seeing by how terribly strong evidence the suspicion of crime was brought home to him, were the cause of the emotion he manifested.

Signor Fortini, again, with rapid and practised acuteness, ran over all the circumstances in his mind; and his conclusion, unavoidable, as he felt it, was that the Marchese must have done the deed. That the criminal authorities would come to the same conclusion he could not feel the smallest doubt.

"Good God! Signor Fortini, this is very dreadful! It is as new to my mind—it comes upon me now for the first time, as much as if I had not known the fact of her death. But I see it—I see it all; as you put the matter now before me. What am I to do?—gracious heaven, what am I to do?"

"I have already told you, what you have to do; the only thing that you *can* do. You have time enough to make it quite safe, that you may be across the frontier before any pursuit can overtake you. As for

pursuing you across the frontier, that can only be done diplomatically, and of course by means which would leave you ample time to quit Tuscany."

"Signor Fortini, I am innocent of this crime. It is a crime which sickens me with horror to think of. What passed in the Pineta passed exactly as I told you. I left that unhappy girl sleeping, intending to be absent from her but a few minutes. And as there is a God in heaven I never again saw her till I saw her dead at the gate," said Ludovico, speaking with intense earnestness.

"But even if you should convince me, Signor Marchese, that such were in truth the case, whom else do you think you would be able to convince? Not one, not a single soul; above all, certainly not one of those who are used to the investigation of crime, or of those who would have to pronounce judgment on it. If I were perfectly and entirely persuaded of your innocence I should still urge you to fly. The facts of the case are too strong against you."

"But *is* that the advice you would give to an innocent man, Signor Fortini? Is that the course which an innocent man would take? Should I not by flying add such an additional damning circumstance to the other grounds of suspicion, as to render all possible hope of clearing myself vain?" remonstrated Ludovico.

"It is true, it would do so; and the argument is, I am bound to say, the argument of an innocent man. In any other case, in *any* other case, I should say face inquiry and prove your innocence. But, Signor Marchese, I dare not recommend you to do so. The facts, as I said, are too strong for you. Remember, too, that you do not throw away any chance

by flight. For the only possible circumstance that could exonerate you would be the discovery that the deed was done by some other; and should that ever be proved or provable, you would at once return, plainly stating that you fled, not from guilt, but from a due appreciation of the fatal weight of suspicion that the circumstances and the facts cast on you. In such a case, in such a very improbable case, I should not hesitate to testify that, being by accident made aware of the circumstances, I had recommended and urged you to fly. No innocent man is bound to suffer for the misfortune of lying under a false suspicion if he can help it. You cannot face the suspicion that will rest upon you; instant flight is the only course open to you."

"Did you not say yourself at the gate just now, Signor Fortini," said Ludovico, making a strong effort to recover the use of his almost stunned faculties—"did you not yourself say that it was evidently a case of sudden death, probably from heart disease?"

"Pshaw! to the people there; to those blockheads at the gate, I said so, of course I did; but the medical folks will soon find out all about that."

"But again, as you remarked very truly, the only possible motive that I could be suspected of having for wishing the death of this unfortunate woman must be supposed to arise from my knowledge of the fact that my uncle had proposed marriage to her."

"And is not that motive enough, *per Dio?*" interrupted the lawyer.

"Doubtless it might, at all events, seem so to some people. But you spoke of my persuading her to go on this unhappy excursion with a view, as your words imply, of committing the crime you suspect me of.

Now I knew nothing of any such intention on the part of my uncle till she communicated it to me when we were in the forest."

"That is your statement——"

"And you must remember, Signor Fortini, that I made that statement to you before I knew anything of her death."

"Before you knew anything of her death. Pshaw! You are assuming your innocence of the deed. Yes, I remember what you said. I remember only too well. Had you not spoken to me, there might have been no proof that you knew anything at all of your uncle's purpose. I wish to heaven you had not said a word to me on the subject. I shall have to testify that you declared to me, that your uncle's offer to her had been communicated to you by her. It will be impossible to avoid that. And it will be impossible to persuade the magistrate that you had not previous knowledge of such a purpose from other sources."

"But why should any such intended offer on the part of my uncle be ever heard of at all?" urged Ludovico. "He will most assuredly never be willing to speak of it, and——"

"*Che!* As if that old man, her so-called father, will not be open-mouthed as to that—as if he would not proclaim it to the whole city. Ah—h—h! it is a bad business, Signor Marchese, a bad business."

"And is it possible, Signor Fortini, that you do really in your own heart believe me to be guilty of this deed?" said Ludovico, with a sigh that was almost a groan, and looking steadily and wistfully into the eyes of his companion.

"What is more to the purpose, unfortunately, is that it does not signify a straw whether I believe it or not. You will not be judged, Signor Marchese, by my belief; and I am very sure what those who have to judge you will believe. I have some experience of these matters. I know the courts. I see the exceeding difficulty of believing anything else as to this death than that it was done by your hands; by you, who had the opportunity and the motive, whereas, it is impossible to suggest any semblance of such motive on the part of any other human being; by you, in whose company she was last seen alive. She had valuable ornaments about her person. If you had removed them it would, at least, have left it open to the magistrates to attribute the deed to another motive, and to other hands. I see all this. I see the whole case before me; and, I tell you, that your only chance is to escape while it is yet time."

"My solemn assertion, then, produces no effect on your mind, Signor Fortini?" said Ludovico, looking at him steadily.

"Signor Marchese," said the lawyer, with an impatient shake of the head, "let us look at the matter from the opposite point of view. If you had killed this woman, let us say, what would your conduct be? Would you not, in that case, make exactly the assertions that you now make? That is the terrible consideration that makes all assertion valueless in the case of such suspicion. But, once again, why dwell on my belief in the matter, which is nothing to the purpose? I have put your position, whether you are guilty or not guilty, clearly before your eyes. I counsel you, and strongly urge you, while yet unac-



cused, to escape from the accusation, which will be made against you within an hour. I am ready to assist you with the means of escaping——”

“Signor Fortini, I cannot avail myself of them. I have made up my mind I will not add another such damning ground of suspicion against me. Here I will remain to answer, as best I can, all the accusations that may be brought against me. I will not fly.”

The old lawyer shook his head and sighed deeply.

“A bad business,” he said, “a very bad business. It will kill the Marchese Lamberto; and I won’t say what I would not have given to have escaped seeing your father’s son, Signor Marchese, in the position in which you stand.”

“Will you carry your kindness yet one step further, Signor Fortini, and, despite my rejection of your first advice, tell me what you think I had better first do—now immediately, I mean—on the supposition that I am determined to remain in the city?”

“I think,” said the lawyer, after a pause for consideration, “that the best course for you to take in the case would be to go at once to the magistrates and make your statement to them of the circumstances according to your own version of the story,—stating that you hastened to do so on seeing the dead body at the city gate; I think that is the best thing you can do. Observe, I cannot say that I think it likely that, if you do so, you will pass this night under the roof of the Palazzo Castelmare; but, if you are determined to remain in the city, I think that is the best thing you can do.”

“That, then, I will do,” returned the Marchese. “I thank you, Signor Fortini, for the advice which I

can follow, and not less for that which I cannot follow. Good-evening."

"Good-evening, Signor Marchese. I hope it may be better with you than I fear. And, of course, if you need me, as you will, you will summon me, and I will not fail to be with you within a few minutes of your call."

"Thanks, Signor Fortini. *Addio.*"

"One word more, Signor Marchese, before you go. When you uncovered the face of the woman lying dead yonder you exclaimed, 'Paolina!' What was the thought that led you to do so? You could not have mistaken the identity? Of course, you know that I question you only in your own interest?"

"Did I say 'Paolina?' replied the Marchese, with an apparent effort at recollecting himself.

"You did. On seeing the face you exclaimed, 'Paolina mia!'—so much so, that I felt no doubt that it was this Paolina who lay dead there. What was it moved you to that exclamation?"

"I don't know. I can't tell. I was very anxious about Paolina. The thought of her was uppermost in my mind, I suppose."

"Humph!" said the lawyer, thoughtfully and doubtfully.

All this conversation had passed hurriedly in the small deserted street into which Ludovico and the lawyer had turned on leaving the city gate; and, when they parted, the two men took different directions,—the lawyer returning to the gate with the germ of an idea in his mind, which the last portion of his conversation with the Marchese had generated there, and

which subsequent circumstances tended to develop, and the Marchese Ludovico going in the direction of the *Palazzo del Governo*.

## CHAPTER II.

### Suspicion.

THE Marchese Ludovico told the lawyer that he would go immediately to the magistrates and make a voluntary statement of all that he knew of the circumstances connected with Bianca's death; and he fully purposed doing so. But he did not do it *immediately*. There was another visit which he was more anxious to pay; and which the hint that had dropped from the old lawyer to the effect that it was very probable he might not pass that night in his own home, determined him to pay first at all hazards.

This visit, as may readily be imagined, was to Paolina. And to the modest little home in the Strada di Santa Eufemia he hurried as fast as his legs would carry him, as soon as he quitted Signor Fortini. Paolina, on returning home after her conversation with the Contessa Violante in the Cardinal's chapel, had remained there busy with the preparation of her materials for beginning her work at Saint Apollinare on the following day.

She looked up as he entered the room with an arch smile on her lips and in her eyes which, perhaps, did not reflect altogether faithfully the feeling in her heart.

"Yes, I saw you, you naughty, inconstant boy, when you little thought my eye was upon you. I saw

you with—— Ludovico, there is something wrong," she said, suddenly changing her laughing tone for one of alarm as her eye marked the expression of his face. "I am sure from the way you look at me there is something amiss. What is it, Ludovico mio? What has happened to vex you?"

"A great and terrible misfortune has happened, my Paolina; and I have run to you in all haste that you might not hear it from any lips but my own. You were going to say just now that you saw me with Bianca Lalli, were you not? Where and when did you see us?"

"In a *bagarino*, driving towards the Pineta. I was up at a high window in the church on the scaffolding prepared for my work," said Paolina, deadly pale, and breathless with apprehension.

"Ah! you saw us from the window. I took her there at her request to see the Pineta. We started on leaving the ball-room. In the forest she became sleepy: I left her sleeping on a bank, and meaning to return to her in a few minutes. I could not find the spot again for some time; and when I did find it she was gone. After searching the wood in vain for hours I returned to the city, and—at the gate—not an hour ago—I saw her brought in—dead!"

"Dead! La Bianca dead!" cried Paolina, much shocked; and with every vestige of the half-formed suspicions which had been tormenting her suddenly erased from her mind by the terrible tidings and the sadness of the end of the unfortunate Diva.

"Dead, my Paolina; and I am suspected of having murdered her," he said slowly, and with an accent of profound despair.

"What—*what!* You suspected! By whom? What does it mean? La Bianca murdered—and by you. What does it mean, Ludovico mio? For pity's sake tell me, what does it mean?"

And the pale features began to work, and the large deep eyes filled with tears, and the next moment she fell back into a chair sobbing hysterically.

"I was the last person with whom she was seen alive; and—there was, it seems, strong reason why it may be supposed that I should wish her dead—God help me! I learned this morning—the poor girl told me herself, to my extreme surprise—that my uncle, the Marchese Lamberto, had proposed marriage to her. You can understand, my darling, that such a marriage would be a very dreadful misfortune to me: therefore, people think that I put the unhappy girl to death."

"Oh, my love, my love; come to me, come to me, and let me hold you!" said the poor girl, struggling to speak amid her convulsive sobbing, and holding out her hands towards him. "Oh, my Ludovico, this is very dreadful. But it is impossible—impossible! They will know that it is impossible that you could have done such a thing. Murder! You—murder a defenceless girl! Oh, it is nonsense. Nobody will believe anything so monstrous."

"Thanks, my Paolina—thanks, my own darling. At least there is one heart that knows me. And, my Paolina, it is an immense comfort to me—not that I doubted it for an instant—but it is an infinite comfort to me to know that you, at least in your heart of hearts, are certain that I did not—that it never could have entered into my mind to do this thing."

"I believe it! I could just as soon imagine that I myself had done it. But, Ludovico, my beloved, it will not be believed; it is too monstrous. You are known here; it cannot be believed."

"And yet, my Paolina, one who has known me all my life, who was my father's friend—one who knows me well, and who looks at things as the magistrates will look at them—he believes it; believes it so much, and is so certain that others will believe it, that he strongly urged me to escape from the city, and from the country. That, Paolina, knowing my innocence, I would not do. To save myself from the stake I would not have gone away without telling you, my own one, that I had not done this deed. I could not go, and so leave you——"

"My own—my own! How I love you, my Ludovico, now in the time of this great trouble better than ever I did before. There was no need to *tell me*, my love, that your hands are innocent of murder. But surely—surely you did well not to fly, leaving the hideous accusation behind you."

"So I thought, my own love—my own high-minded right-thinking darling—so I thought; and here I stay to answer my accusers. But the fatality of the circumstances is such that—in truth, I see little hope of clearing myself, save by the possible discovery of the causes that led to this terrible death."

"Was there anything to show how she—that is, I mean, whether she—died by violence?" asked Paolina.

"Nothing—nothing whatever. As we saw the body under the city gateway, when the men who found it brought it in, there was not the smallest

trace of violence visible. She lay as if, save for the deadly pallor of her face, she might have been still sleeping. And I am most anxious for the medical examination of the body. It may be that they will be able to discover that death was produced by some natural cause."

"Surely that is the most likely. Had any robbery been committed?" asked Paolina thoughtfully.

"None—none whatever; and she had valuables exposed on her person which were untouched. This is one of the worst circumstances against me; as it excludes the idea of the dead having been done by common malefactors for the sake of plunder."

"And no marks of violence? It must have been a natural death; such things *do* happen. I remember hearing of a case——"

"I must go, darling; I must leave you. I must hasten to the Palazzo del Governo to make my statement of what has occurred. It is hard to leave you, my Paolina—very hard to leave you, not knowing when or under what circumstances I am likely to see you again."

"Ludovico, see me again!" shrieked the girl, as a new and dreadful idea presented itself for the first time to her mind; "why—you will come to me when you have spoken to the magistrates; you will tell me what they say."

"I fear me, Paolina, that it will not be in my power to do that," returned Ludovico, with a melancholy smile. "Should they leave me at liberty, of course I shall fly to you on the instant they dismiss me. But, you must not expect that, my love. I shall be detained doubtless, until—until the truth has been

discovered respecting this horrible tragedy. One kiss my own, own darling before we part."

She sprang into his opened arms with a bound, almost before the words had quitted his lips, and clasped him to her heart with all the strength she could exert. Then drawing herself a little back, and placing her two little hands on the front of his shoulders, she said, speaking with breathless hurry,—

"See now, my love, my only love. You must remember all the time, that there is no hour of the day or night that I shall not be thinking of you, and loving you all the time, always, always. And remember, that if all the whole world says that you did this thing, I shall still know that it was as impossible as that I did it myself. Remember that always, my best beloved."

"Thanks, my Paolina; it will be very sweet to me to remember it. And dearest, one thing more. It will hardly be likely that in the present circumstances, under all this weight of misfortune, my poor uncle will be likely to have time or attention to give to you. But if you have need of anything—of advice, of assistance, of protection—speak to the Contessa Violante, and—stay, you shall take a message to her from me. Tell her that I begged you to say, as from me to her, that in the teeth of all appearances I am innocent in thought, word, and deed in this matter. I think she will believe it; I must go, my love, my own!"

"Pray God, it be not for long, *tesoro mio*. I shall pray to the Holy Virgin for you morning and night."

"*Addio*, Paolina mia. Yet one kiss, *anima mia*, *addio*."



From the Strada di Santa Eufemia Ludovico hurried as quickly as he could to the Palazzo del Governo; but found that he was not in time to be the first bearer to the police magistrate of the tidings of what had happened. The report of the officials at the gate had already been given in, and the police had already taken possession of the body.

The magistrate received him with grave courtesy, saying that he was glad the Signor Marchese had presented himself in order to throw what light he could on this sad affair, as rumour had already reached his (the magistrate's) ears mixing the name of the Marchese Ludovico with the subject in a manner that would have made it his duty to call the Marchese, had he not of himself judged it right to anticipate the action of justice in the matter.

Then Ludovico related clearly and shortly how the excursion to the Pineta had been imagined and planned between him and Bianca at the ball; how they had put their plan into execution; how he had left her sleeping in the forest, and had been unable to find her again; how he had returned, after spending much time in fruitless seeking, and had shortly afterwards, being then in the company of Signor Giovacchino Fortini, seen the dead body of the unfortunate lady brought into the city by men who had discovered it in the forest.

The magistrate listened attentively to this history in silence, save that he once or twice interrupted Ludovico to ask at what o'clock it had been that the different incidents happened. Then he reduced the whole statement to writing, and read it over to the Marchesino.

"Your lordship parted then from Signor Fortini, after witnessing in his company the arrival of the corpse at the gate, nearly an hour ago. You did not come to make your report to us here at once? I must ask you how you have employed the interval?" said the magistrate shooting a sharp glance from under his black eyebrows at Ludovico, who was sitting opposite to him, with a little table between them, on which there were writing-materials.

"In visiting a lady, to whom I was very anxious to tell these unfortunate circumstances myself, instead of allowing them to come to her ears in any other manner," answered Ludovico simply.

"The lady's name? I ask in confidence, you know; unless of course the fact should turn out to have any bearing on the discovery of the truth as to this most unhappy business."

"The lady is the Signorina Paolina Foscarelli, a Venetian artist sent here to make copies of some of our mosaics, and recommended to my uncle the Marchese Lamberto."

"With whom you had no acquaintance previous to her bringing that recommendation?"

"None whatever."

"But since that time you have become intimate with her?"

"It is true."

"Signor Marchese, this is a most lamentable and unhappy affair. It is my duty to point out to you, what doubtless your own good sense has already suggested to you—that the mere facts, as you have related them to me, place you in a very unfortunate position. But most unhappily—it is exceedingly painful to me

to have to say it—there is, if what has already reached my ears be true, worse, much worse behind. I am obliged to ask you what conversation, of a special nature, passed between you and Bianca Lalli during your excursion?"

"I will make no pretence at not understanding your question, Signor, nor any attempt to conceal the truth. I have already stated the facts; or that, which you have evidently heard, could not have reached your ears. The Signorina Bianca Lalli confided to me the fact, that my uncle the Marchese Lamberto had offered marriage to her."

"Most lamentable, and to be regretted in every way," said the magistrate, gravely shaking his head. "You perceive, Signor Marchese, the terrible, but inevitable suggestion, that arises from the fact of your having been made aware of a purpose so disastrous to your interests?"

"I call your attention, Signor, again to the fact, that nothing would have been known of any such communication having been made to me, had I not spontaneously mentioned the circumstance myself."

"It is true, Signor Marchese, and it will not be forgotten that this circumstance was spontaneously mentioned by you. But you must observe, that the fact of the proposal made by the Marchese Lamberto would have become known in more ways than one. And unhappily the fact that such a proposal had been made, would throw a very disagreeable light on the extraordinary circumstances of this death. To whom would the death of this unfortunate woman be profitable? That is the fatal question, Signor Marchese, which it is impossible to avoid asking."

"I am aware of the cruelty of the inference suggested by the circumstance, Signor Commissario," said Ludovico sadly.

"Have you any suggestion to offer yourself as to the possible means by which this woman may have met with her death?" asked the Commissary of Police.

"As far as I could see at the city gate, and according to the statement of the men who found the body, there was no indication of violence whatever to be found on it. My suggestion therefore, and my trust is, that the cause of her death was a natural one."

"That will be a question for the medical authorities to decide," said the Commissary.

"I was about to ask you whether they had proceeded to any examination yet?" said Ludovico.

"Not yet; we shall have the report immediately; and it shall be at once communicated to you."

"At the Palazzo Castelmare?" said Ludovico, though he had but very little hope that he should be allowed to remain at large.

The Commissary shook his head very gravely.

"I need hardly tell you, Signor Marchese, how painful it is to me to be compelled to announce to you that we cannot find it consistent with our duty to allow you under the circumstances to quit this building. The utmost that can be done to make your detention as little uncomfortable to you as possible, shall be done. And I can only say that I trust it may be but for a short time."

"Permit me to observe, Signor Commissario, that after seeing the dead body at the gate,—to say nothing of all the hours previously, if I had been guilty,—I had abundance of time to escape, and to place myself

to come within her walls; and in return for the delight which she had given them—murders her. Other cities vie with each other in doing honour to the gifted artist. She ventures to Ravenna, and—is murdered.

There was a bitterness in Signor Fortini's consideration of the matter from this point of view, which was more poignant than any other man than an Italian would quite understand. For nowhere else do municipal pride, jealousy, and patriotism run so high.

A foul and cruel murder had been done: so much was certain. Signor Fortini had not the smallest hope that the death would be found to have resulted from natural causes. And then came the consideration whether there could be any hope that, after all, the deed had been done by some other hand than that of the young Marchese di Castelmare.

After thinking deeply for several minutes, the lawyer shook his head. That such a deed might have been done in the forest on the person of one found sleeping there, whose appearance was such as to hold out the expectation of booty to a plunderer, was possible—not very likely, but possible. Possible enough to suppose that lawless and evil-disposed persons might have been wandering there—depredators on the forest, who exist in great numbers—smugglers making their way across the country by hidden paths, or what not? Possible enough that such a deed might have been done, and the perpetrators of it far away before the discovery of the body, away to the southward, and across the Apennine into Tuscany in the space of a few hours. *But* all such possibilities were conclusively negatived by the certain fact that no plunder had

been attempted, that plunder could not have been the object of the murderer.

Alarmed before they could carry their object into execution by the approach of footsteps? Was this a plausible or a possible theory?

No; for the poor Diva had valuable ornaments visible on her person, an enamelled gold watch at her girdle, a diamond pin or brooch at the fastening of her dress on her chest, to possess themselves of which would have needed less time than was required for the perpetration of the murder. It was wholly impossible to suppose, on any hypothesis, that the murder could have been committed for the sake of plunder, and that these ornaments could have been left untouched.

It had been observed, and was noted—not in the report drawn up by the officials at the gate, but in the more exact and detailed report furnished by the police on their taking of the body into their charge—that the brooch, which has been mentioned, was unfastened, so as to be left hanging in the dress by its pin. But this circumstance did not seem to be of much moment, as it might well have been that Bianca herself had unfastened it before falling asleep.

No; it was but too clear, as the lawyer said to himself, that murder and not robbery had been the object of the perpetrator of the crime.

There was, it was true, nothing improbable in the story told by the Marchese Ludovico. That the girl should have been overpowered by sleep, after having passed the night at the ball, and then started on an expedition so foreign to her usual habits, was abundantly likely. That he might have become tired of sitting still while she slept, and might have strayed

away from her, not intending to quit her for more than a few minutes and a few yards, was also perfectly probable. That having so strayed he might have been unable to find his way back again to the spot where he had left her, or to be certain whether he had found the same spot again or not, would not seem at all unlikely to any one acquainted with the Pineta. All this story was likely and natural enough.

But—the motive—the inevitable inference from that terrible *cui bono* question. For whom was it profitable, that this poor girl should be put to death? According to the fatal information, which, by his own account, he had received but a short time previously from the victim herself, information, the truth and accuracy of which were well known to the lawyer from the Marchese Lamberto himself, the whole future prospects in life of the Marchese Ludovico depended on the life or death of this unhappy woman.

If the Marchese Lamberto carried out his insane intention of marrying La Bianca Lalli his nephew would become simply destitute. After having been accustomed, from the cradle to the age of four-and-twenty, to all that riches could procure—after having lived in the sure expectation of wealth up to an age when it was too late to think of making himself capable of earning a competence for himself in any conceivable manner, this marriage would take from him suddenly, and for ever, all such prospect; and the death of the woman who had bewitched his uncle thus fatally would make all safe, for the Marchese Lamberto was not a marrying man—was, as all the town knew, the last man in the world to have dreamed of taking a wife now at this time of his life.

No; it was the fatal fascination, the witchery, the lures of this one woman. Remove her, and all would be right.

Ah! The mischief, the woe, the scandal, the disgrace, the irretrievable calamity, and the misery, that this accursed folly of the Marchese Lamberto had caused. Ah! to think of all the sorrow and trouble this woman brought with her into the city when she was so triumphantly welcomed within the walls by these two unhappy men—the uncle and the nephew.

It was strongly and curiously characteristic of the Italian mind that Signor Fortini, in coming to the conclusion that this deed must, beyond the possibility of doubt, have been committed by the Marchese Ludovico and none other, was mainly and specially moved by compassion for the perpetrator of the crime. There is something in this Italian mode of viewing human events and human conduct curiously analogous to that conception of mortal destinies on which the pathos of the old Greek tragedy mainly rests.

How cruel was the fate which had thus compelled the young man to perceive that the life of this girl and his own welfare were incompatible!

How dreadful the pitiless working of the great, blind, automatic, destiny-machine!

To raise a murderous hand against the life of a sleeping girl—how dreadful! How great, therefore, must have been the suffering which impelled a man to do so!

He had evidently been driven to desperation by the prospect of the utter and tremendous ruin that threatened him; and "desperation," the absence of all hope, is recognized, both by the popular mind of Italy



and by its theoretic theology, as a sufficient cause for any course of action. It is especially taught by Roman Catholic theology that it is, above all things, wicked so to act towards a man as to drive him to desperation; and the popular ethics invariably visit with deeper reprobation any cause of conduct which has tempted another man to make himself guilty of a violent crime than it does the criminal himself.

Thus, lawyer and law-abiding man as he was, with all the habits of a long life between him and the possibility of his raising his own hand against the life of any man, Signor Fortini, as he mused on the tragedy which had fallen out, felt more of compassion for the Marchese Ludovico, and more of anger against the folly of his uncle.

This thing, too, which the Marchese Lamberto had announced his intention of doing, sinned against all those virtues which, let the professions of the moral code say what they may, stand really highest in an Italian estimation. It was eminently unwise; it was imprudent; it was indecorous; it was calculated to produce scandal; it would bring disgrace upon a noble name; it was ridiculous; and, besides all this, it necessarily drove another to "desperation."

"A fool! An insane idiot! Worst of all fools—an old fool! To think that a man, who had stood so many years in the eyes of all men as he had stood, should come to such a downfall. It would serve him no more than right, if it were possible, that all the consequences of what had been done should fall on his own head.

Still, during all the musings which seemed to force him to the conclusion that the crime which had been

committed was the deed of the Marchese Ludovico, the old lawyer did not lose sight of the idea which had been suggested to his mind by that exclamation of Ludovico on the first sight of the murdered woman. He did not, in truth, as yet think that it was worth much; but he kept it safe at the bottom of his mind, ready for being produced if subsequent circumstances should seem to give any value to it.

After musing an hour while these thoughts passed through his mind, the old lawyer thought he would go as far as the Palazzo del Governo to learn what steps had been taken, and whether—though he had very little doubt on that point—his unfortunate young friend had been detained in custody.

Signor Pietro Logarini, the head of the police, was an old acquaintance of Signor Fortini,—as, indeed, was pretty well everybody in any sort of position of authority in the city.

“A bad business this, Signor Pietro,” said Fortini, shaking his head.

“The worst business, Signor Giovacchino, that has happened in Ravenna as long as I can remember. It is very terrible.”

“Is the poor young fellow——?” Signor Fortini completed his question by a movement of his eyes, of one shoulder, and one thumb, quite as intelligible to the person he addressed as any words would have been.

“Yes, of course. There was no help for it, you know.”

“Of course not. I suppose he came here as soon as he parted from me. It so happened that we were

together at the gate when the body was brought there," said Signor Fortini.

"So I understand. You will be called on for your evidence as to his manner on being confronted with it."

"Of course; fortunately I have nothing to say on that point that can do any damage. He was much moved, naturally; we both were; but nothing more than any man in his place would have been."

"But the worst, the only fatal point in that confession of his, is that the girl told him of the Marchese Lamberto's intention of marrying her. Why in heaven's name did he let that slip out?"

"My notion is that it just did slip out, as you say. An old hand, a man accustomed to be at odds with the laws and the police, would have known better. Did he make the same statement here?" asked Fortini, rather surprised.

"On my asking him, as I felt compelled to do, what special conversation had passed between him and the girl that morning, he told me the fact," replied the Commissary.

"But what led you to ask him such a question?" said Fortini.

"Ah!—something that had reached my ears. We are forced, you know, Signor Giovacchino, to have very long ears in our business. His conversation with you to-day was held in the street,—a bad place for such talk, Signor Giovacchino."

"And not chosen by me for such a purpose, as you may imagine. Little could I guess what sort of confidence I was about to hear."

"Not that it makes any difference. All that would

have had to come out, you know, Signor Giovacchino."

"Oh, quite so, quite so; no, no difference in the world. Did he come to you immediately on leaving me?"

"No; it would have been better upon the whole if he had done so. He went first, it seems, to the residence of a lady, one Signorina Paolina Foscarelli, being very desirous, he said, of not leaving her to hear of the business from other lips than his own. It is a pity, because his abstaining from flight might have been something in his favour, if he had not made it appear, that his remaining in the city might have been caused by his desire to see again this Paolina. Do you know anything about her? I see by our books that she came here last autumn from Venice. What is she like?"

"It so happens that I never saw her. But I am told that she is pretty—very pretty—remarkably so."

"Ah—h—h! that's what kept the poor young fellow from running till it was too late to run. And yet," continued the Commissary, pausing on his words, and tapping his forehead with his finger as if a new idea had just occurred to him—"and yet the young Don Juan goes out *tête-à-tête* into the forest with this other girl."

"*Che volete?*" returned the lawyer with a shrug. "Boys will be boys, and women—are women."

"Yes; but the women sometimes don't quite like——" and the Commissary allowed the remainder of his sentence to remain unspoken, being apparently too much occupied with his thoughts to speak it.

"I suppose the medical report can hardly have been made yet?" asked the lawyer, on whom the suppressed meaning of the Police Commissary's broken sentence was not lost.

"No; there has not been time. It was too late in the afternoon. Professor Tomasarchi will make a *post-mortem* examination the first thing to-morrow morning; and I daresay we shall have his report in the course of the day, if, as is most likely, there is nothing to call for more than a superficial examination."

"I shall be very anxious to hear the result of his investigation—very. I will look in, if you will allow me, to-morrow morning. And now I think I will go to that unfortunate man, the Marchese Lamberto. I should not be at all surprised if I were to find that he had heard nothing about all this. Only think what it is I shall have to tell him—the woman about whom he has been so mad as to have determined on sacrificing to her everything, fame, position, friends, respect,—everything—is dead! It is his monstrous proposal that has caused her death; and the same folly has made the representative of his house a murderer and a felon. Think, Signor Pietro, what that man's feelings must be when these tidings are told him."

"Depend upon it, the whole city knows all about it by this time," said the Commissary.

"But I think it exceedingly likely that he has not been out of his library all day," returned the lawyer.

"But the servants will have heard the news. Ill news travels fast," said the Commissary, with a shrug.

"Yes; but the servants will hardly have ventured

to repeat such tidings to him. Two to one it will fall to my lot to tell him. A pleasant office, isn't it, Signor Pietro?"

"Not one I should like to undertake. Good-evening, Signor Giovacchino. If I don't see you to-morrow morning I will send you a couple of lines with the result of the medical examination."

"Thanks, Signor Pietro; but I will look in about the beginning of your office hours to-morrow morning. I feel as if I should be able to think of nothing else but this terrible business for some time to come. *Felice sera.*"

And so the old lawyer went off to call upon his client, the Marchese Lamberto, truly dreading the interview, and yet not without a certain degree of satisfaction, and a kind of I-told-you-so feeling in the prospect of announcing to the unhappy Marchese those terrible first-fruits of the disastrous purpose, in condemnation of which the lawyer had spoken so strongly a few hours ago.

---

## CHAPTER IV.

The Marchese hears the Ill News.

SIGNOR FORTINI judged rightly, when he said that he thought it probable that the Marchese Lamberto had not quitted his library, from the time when he had left him there, after the conversation, in which the Marchese had avowed his purpose with regard to La Bianca.

The shrewd lawyer had well understood, that the final decision with regard to such a purpose, and the definite announcement of it, which the Marchese had made to him, his lawyer, were not likely to dispose such a man to meet the eyes of his fellow-citizens. Had Fortini known that the Marchese had been made aware of the purposed excursion of his nephew with the singer—as the reader knows that he had been by the officious meddling of the Conte Leandro,—it might have seemed strange that he should have chosen just that day and hour for the declaration of his intention. Was it that he hastened to acquire such an authority over Bianca, as might enable him to put an end to any such escapades for the future? Was it that he was infatuated to that degree, that he feared that if he did not make haste to secure the prize, it might be taken from him by his nephew?

However this might have been, the overt step he had taken had certainly not had the effect of tranquillizing his mind. The hours of that day, since the lawyer left him, had been passed in the most miserable manner by him.

The servants had all learned, that there was something very decidedly wrong with their master. The man who usually attended on him personally, surprised at his master spending the day in a manner so unusual with him, had made various excuses to enter the library two or three times in the course of the day. Each time he had found the Marchese, instead of being busily employed, as was usual with him, when in his library, either sitting in his easy-chair with his hands before him, and his head hanging on his breast, doing absolutely nothing; or else pacing up and down the room.

As the afternoon went on, and the Marchese still did not go out, his valet, really uneasy about him, found the means of watching him without entering the room. Again and again he saw him rise from his chair and, after two or three turns across the room, return to it. Often he went to the window, and looked out, as if expecting something. Three or four times he observed him start violently at the sound of a door banging in some other part of the palace.

Once in the course of the afternoon the servant had had a genuine excuse for entering the room. The Conte Leandro had called, and asked if the Marchese was at home. He had not seen the Marchese Ludovico in the course of the day, and was curious to find out what had been the result of the eavesdropping that he had retailed to the Marchese Lamberto. That it had not availed to induce the Marchese to interfere in any way to put a stop to the excursion, the Conte Leandro had the means of knowing, as will presently appear. But his curiosity was doomed to remain unsatisfied. The Marchese had replied with a savage ill-humour, that the old servant had never seen in his master be-



fore, that he did not want to see the Conte, leaving the domestic to modify the harshness of the reply as he might.

When, however, some hours later, Signor Fortini came to the door, and despite what the servants told him of the state their master was in, and of his refusal to see the Conte Leandro, insisted on being announced, the Marchese admitted him.

The first thought that flashed through the lawyer's brain, when he came into the presence of his old friend and client, was a profound sense of self-congratulation at his own freedom from all connection with womankind.

His own experience of married life, essayed in early years and happily brought to a conclusion after a probation of a very short time, had, as has been hinted, not been a happy one. He had very deeply felt, some five-and-forty years ago, that nothing in the Signora Fortini's life had become her like the leaving of it. And during all those years of widowhood, the remembrance of that first burning of his fingers had sufficed to make the old gentleman a consistent misogynist.

"Ah, here is another specimen of women's work," he thought to himself, as he observed the utter wretchedness of the Marchese's appearance, and the traces in him of a day spent in misery. "And he, too, who had escaped for fifty years! If I had avoided the springes for fifty years, I don't think I should have been caught at last. Maybe, it is all the worse for coming to a man so late. Now here is this man, who had everything the world could give to make his happiness, wrecked, ruined, destroyed, blasted by the

sight of a painted piece of woman's flesh, and the lure of a pair of devil-instructed eyes. And he knows that it is ruin. He knows which is the evil, and which the good, and yet is so besotted, that he has not the power to take the one and leave the other. Is not the sight of the unhappy wretch, as he sits cowering there, afraid, evidently afraid to meet my eye, a warning and a caution?"

And, in truth, the appearance of the Marchese might have been held to justify these reflections of the lawyer, who was right in supposing that no tidings of what had happened had reached the Marchese since he had parted from him after their interview that morning. Attributing, therefore, the state of utter moral prostration, mixed with a kind of restless nervous agitation, in which he found him, to the consciousness of the terrible results he was about to bring upon himself by the folly he had decided on committing, the lawyer could not prevent the thought occurring to him that were it not for the dreadful circumstances that seemed to bring home the suspicion of murder to the Marchese Ludovico, the tidings he brought of the death of the unfortunate woman would be, if not a relief at the moment, yet the most fortunate exit for the Marchese from the position he had made for himself.

"Good-evening, Signor Giovacchino. You have come, of course, to ask whether the representations you made to me this morning have availed to induce me to waver in the purpose I announced to you," said the Marchese, scarcely looking up so as to meet the eye of the lawyer.

"Signor Marchese," returned Fortini, "it is my turn this time to communicate to you intelligence

which will strike you, I fear, to the full as painfully as I was struck by what you told me this morning."

The Marchese started; and the lawyer observed that the start seemed to continue and propagate itself, as it were, into a tremor, that ran through all his person, as he said, with chattering teeth: "What do you mean? Has anything happened?—anything—out of the common way, eh?—eh?—what—what is it?"

"That has happened, Signor Marchese, which makes all further consideration of the step you confided to me your intention of taking this morning unnecessary. The lady, whom you purposed to make your wife, is no more."

"No more—how no more?—what—what is it you mean?" said the Marchese, evidently terribly shocked, as was manifested by the tremor and shivering which seized him yet more violently than before; yet still without looking up so as to meet the lawyer's eye.

"She is dead, Signor Marchese," said the lawyer, looking at him curiously.

"Dead—La Bianca dead! I don't believe it. It is some scheme for frustrating the purpose you disapproved of—some plan managed between you and my nephew. You have sent her away, and want to persuade me that she is dead."

"Your mind is unhinged by the shock of my intelligence, Signor Marchese—naturally enough—or such an absurd notion would not have occurred to you. I have seen the dead body of Bianca Lalli. It is now in the custody of the police," said the lawyer, with slow gravity.

"The police!" cried the Marchese, shooting a momentary glance up into the lawyer's face.

"Necessarily so; for, Signor Marchese, the unhappy—the miserable truth is that a foul murder has been committed. The girl was murdered in the Pineta this morning."

"Murdered! Gracious heaven! Murdered—but why murdered? Why may she not have died by a natural death?—that is—I mean—of course I mean, if there were no evident marks of violence on the body."

The lawyer paused a minute, as if some cause of perplexity had been suggested to him by the words of the Marchese, before he replied,—

"There were, in truth, no marks of evident violence on the body, or, at least, none such as an unskilled eye would observe on a very superficial examination. But all that will be ascertained at the medical examination, which will take place to-morrow morning. But I think it can hardly be doubted that the death was not a natural one," said the lawyer, shaking his head gravely.

"And the Marchese Ludovico?" asked the Marchese, rather strangely, as it struck the lawyer, seeing that nothing had as yet been said to connect the young Marchese with the catastrophe, and he was not aware of the fact that the Marchese knew of his nephew's excursion to the Pineta.

"That, alas! is the worst part of the bad story—we, at least, here in Ravenna are perhaps excusable in thinking it the worst. The fact is, Signor Marchese, that this death took place under circumstances which seem to leave no doubt that the deed was done by the hand of the Marchese Ludovico."

"The hand of the Marchese Ludovico! Gracious heaven! But that is nonsense, Signor Fortini. No

doubt? How can there be no doubt, merely because he was with her in the forest?"

There was something in the Marchese's manner which made it seem to the lawyer as if he must have already heard of the tragedy that had happened, and of the suspicion that had been thrown on his nephew.

"Were you aware, then, Signor Marchese," he asked, "that the Marchese Ludovico had gone to the Pineta with this unhappy woman?"

The Marchese dropped his head upon his chest and paused a minute, passing his hand slowly across his brow and before his eyes, before he replied,—

"Yes, I knew that," he said, at length; "the Conte Leandro told me of it."

"Your people told me, just now, that you had refused to see the Conte Leandro, when he called," remarked the lawyer, again looking puzzled.

"Yes, I refused to see him because my mind was full of the conversation we had this morning. You know I promised you, Signor Fortini, that I would think over the matter again; and I was engaged in doing so. I have been thinking of it all day; I was thinking of it still when you came in."

"Thinking still of your purpose of making the woman, La Bianca, your wife. Then you could not have heard of her miserable end when I came in,—as I supposed, indeed, you could not have heard," remarked the lawyer.

"Heard of it? Why of course not. That is clear—that proves that I could not have heard of it, you know," said the Marchese, with a strange sort of eagerness.

"When was it, then, that you heard from the

Conte Leandro, that the Marchese Ludovico was in the Pineta with La Bianca?" asked the lawyer.

"At the ball," replied the Marchese, after a minute's thought, "at the ball. He came to me and told me that they had planned an excursion to the forest, as soon as they left the ball-room. The Conte Leandro told me of it, because, he said, he thought it an imprudent thing, and I should disapprove it. But why should I, you know? I said nothing to either of them about it. Why not let them have such an innocent enjoyment? Young people must be young, you know, Signor Fortini. For my part, I preferred making the best of my way to my bed, after being up all night."

There was a strange kind of nervous eagerness and hurry in the Marchese's manner of saying this, which struck the lawyer as affording yet further evidence of the degree to which his mind had been utterly unhinged by the struggle which had been going on in it, doubtless for a longer time than he, the lawyer, was aware of, between the influence over him which the singer had acquired, and his sense of the terrible nature of the step she was inducing him to take. It seemed necessary to recall his attention to that view of the matter which was now of the most urgent interest, the suspicions which rested on the Marchese Ludovico.

"As you say, Signor Marchese," he resumed, "that Signor Ludovico should have been with La Bianca in the forest, affords no proof sufficient to convict him of being the author of this crime; although the fact of his being the last person in whose company she was ever seen alive, does suffice, in a certain degree, to throw on him the onus of showing that he is innocent of it.

But the worst is—the damning feature of the matter is, that he had a very strong and intelligible reason for wishing this Bianca out of the way. Remember that your marriage with her would have the effect of reducing him to beggary. Put that fact side by side with the facts that he takes her to a solitary place in the Pineta, and that she is shortly afterwards found there murdered; and I am afraid—I am dreadfully afraid that the judges will not resist the conclusion that, in truth, seems forced upon them. It is a bad business, Signor Marchese; a very bad and ugly business.”

“But I had not mentioned to the Marchese Ludovico my intention with regard to the girl. How could he have been led to do such an act by such a motive, when he knew nothing of it?” said the Marchese, after several minutes of consideration.

“Unfortunately he did know it, and has himself stated that he knew it. It seems that the girl herself took the opportunity of their drive together to tell him of the fact. Would to heaven that she had never done so,” said Fortini, with a deep sigh.

“But anybody must see that it is a thousand times more probable that she should have been killed by robbers—vagabonds tramping through the country. The Pineta is always full of them. I am sure I would no more lie—I would no more wander there alone!—Of course the unfortunate girl must have been murdered by brigands.”

“If any robbery had been committed, there might be reason to hope so, or at least ground for such a theory. But, unfortunately, she had exposed on her person valuables exceedingly tempting to a thief; but they remained untouched.”

At that moment there came a loud and hurried rapping at the door. The Marchese started violently in his chair, and turned deadly pale; another proof, if more were needed, of the degree in which his nervous system had been shaken by the intelligence he had received, coming, as it did, on the back of all that had previously contributed to unhinge his mind. In the next instant, a servant put his head into the room, saying that the Conte Leandro had returned, and was urgent to be admitted to see the Marchese, declaring that he had a very important communication to make to him.

"I cannot see him. I will not see him. I will see nobody. Signor Fortini, would you have the kindness to let him understand that I am not in a condition to see anybody?" said the Marchese, apparently much agitated.

The lawyer stepped rapidly to the door, and at the stair-head found the Conte Leandro, bursting with the news, which he had hoped to be the first to communicate to the Marchese, and which, of course, showed how wise and timely had been his own interference in telling the Marchese of the proposed excursion of Ludovico, and how disastrous had been the results of his not having paid due attention to it.

"My dear Conte," said Fortini, "I have just done the painful task which you, doubtless, have kindly come to undertake. You must excuse the Marchese if he declines, for the present, to see you. You will readily understand how terrible the shock has been to him. He is, as might be expected, quite broken down by it. In truth, I wish you had had the telling him instead of me. It was most painful."



"But, Signor Fortini," urged the poet, eagerly, as the lawyer was turning away to return to the Marchese, "are you aware—have you heard what is said in the town?—that the Marchese had offered marriage to La Bianca, and that this was the cause—of course I do not believe anything of the kind myself—but I assure you it is what people are saying. And I think the Marchese ought to be told, you know, for——"

"I will tell the Marchese of your kind intention, Signor Conte," said the lawyer; "I think it would be better for you not to attempt seeing him now. And, in the meantime, you cannot do better than to contradict, most emphatically, any such monstrously absurd reports, as those you have mentioned."

"You know, of course, that Ludovico is arrested; and I am shocked to say, that the general opinion in the city is very much against him. Of course I need not tell you that I am perfectly convinced of his entire innocence. But who, except a really attached friend, would you get to believe it, under the circumstances? Ah! I am afraid it will go hard with him," said the Conte, speaking with eager volubility,—*"I am sadly afraid it will go hard with him."*

"It seems to me, Signor Conte, that any such speculations are a little premature. The Marchese Ludovico has not been even officially accused as yet. At any rate you can console yourself, Signor Conte, with the consideration that you have a magnificent subject for a tragedy in your hands. To such a genuine poet as yourself, that is enough to counterbalance any misfortune that only touches our friends."

And with that the old lawyer turned away to go back to the library; while the poet, though not al-

together without a somewhat annoying notion that he was laughed at, was nevertheless delighted with the excellent idea that had been suggested to him.

"I made him understand that you could not see him. All he wanted was to tell you just what I have already communicated to you," said the lawyer, as he came back into the room. "He said too, by-the-by, that all the town was talking of the offer of marriage made by the Marchese Lamberto to Signora Bianca Lalli——"

"Of course, of course," groaned the Marchese, tossing himself restlessly from one side to the other of his chair. "And to think that at the very time,—at the hour when I was communicating to you the decision I had arrived at with regard to—to that unfortunate—to poor Bianca, she was even then, as it would seem, lying dead in the forest. It is very, very terrible."

"And I told the Signor Conte that he could not do better than contradict such a report wherever he heard it," added the lawyer, who began almost to fancy, from a something that seemed strange to him in the Marchese's manner, that the catastrophe which had come to relieve him in such a terrible manner from the scrape he had got himself into with the singer, was not altogether unwelcome to him.

"It is of no use, Fortini," returned the Marchese, with a groan; "it is of no use. That old man, her reputed father, knows it; their servant knows it; Ludovico knows it: and, of course, his knowledge of it will have to be made public."

"Nevertheless, the denial of it by such a tongue as that of the Conte Leandro Lombardoni can do no

harm in the meantime," said the lawyer, quietly. "It *may* be," he added, "it *may* be that something may turn up to prevent any public accusation of the Marchese. It *may* be that he is not guilty. It *may* be that the deed may yet be brought home to some other hand."

"Do you think that, Fortini? do you think that likely?" said the Marchese, with a quickly withdrawn anxious look into the lawyer's face.

"No, frankly, I do not think it likely. I fear that it is very certain that his hand is the guilty one. Nevertheless, it may be—it is difficult to say—it *may* be. At all events, it is always time enough to abandon hope. I must leave you now, Signor Marchese; I will see you again to-morrow morning."

"Many, many thanks, my good Signor Giovacchino. Do not forget to come. Remember how dreadfully anxious I must be to hear what passes: above all, the result of the medical examination—specially the result of the medical examination."

"I will not fail to come. *I miei saluti*, Signor Marchese."

---

## CHAPTER V.

## Doubts and Possibilities.

IN passing through the hall of the Palazzo the lawyer, who was well acquainted with every servant in the house, took an opportunity of speaking a few words to the Marchese's old valet, Nanni.

"The Marchese seems to have been a little overtired when he came back from the ball this morning, Nanni; and then this is a sad affair about the Marchese Ludovico."

"*Ahi, misericordia!* To think that I should live to hear of a Castelmare arrested in Ravenna. The world is coming to an end, I think, Signor Giovacchino."

"Vexing enough; but not so bad as all that, I hope. No doubt Signor Ludovico will be able to clear himself before long."

"Clear himself!" re-echoed the old servant, very indignantly; "that's just what they say when some poor devil of the *popolaccio* is at odds with the police. The Marchese di Castelmare clear himself! Well, I've lived to see a many things, but I never thought to see the day that such people should dare to meddle with a Castelmare."

"The Marchese Ludovico himself thought fit to go to them to give explanations."

"Ah! He'd have done better to take no notice of 'em, to my thinking," said the old man, shaking his head. "But is it true, Signor Giovacchino, what people say, that——?"

"There is mostly very little truth in what people say, Nanni," interrupted the lawyer. "But I'll tell you what: a good servant should hear all and repeat nothing. It's natural that such an old friend as you should want to know all about it, and to you I shan't mind telling the whole story as soon as I know the rights of it myself. But it vexes me to see the Marchese so put out about it; and then I don't think he has been quite well latterly."

"Nothing like well, these days past, Signor Giovacchino. The Marchese has not been like hisself nowadays. I think he is far from well."

"Does he get his rest at night? That is a great thing at his time of life. He seems to me like a man who has not had his natural sleep. I suppose he went to bed when he came home from the ball?"

"Yes, directly. He seemed in a hurry like to get to bed. When he was about half undressed he said it was time I was in bed myself, and sent me away, and I heard him lock the door."

"Does he generally lock the door at night?" asked the lawyer.

"No; and I knew by that that he meant to have a good sleep, and not be disturbed this morning. So I never went near him till I heard his bell, between ten and eleven o'clock; and when I went he was just getting out of bed, so that he had a matter of six hours' sleep."

"It don't seem to have done him much good any way," rejoined the lawyer, thinking to himself that the hours during which Nanni supposed his master to have been sleeping, had more probably been spent in restless agitation, the result of bringing his mind

to the determination which he had definitely announced to the lawyer, when he had summoned him about an hour after he had risen from his sleepless bed. "I shall come and see how he is to-morrow morning," the lawyer added; "and I hope I may bring some good news about Signor Ludovico."

Behind the Palazzo Castelmare there was an extensive range of stabling and coach-houses, with a large stable-yard opening on to a back street, which was the nearest way to the house of the Signor Professore Tomosarchi, on whom Signor Fortini thought he would call, just to ask whether he had yet seen the body, or at what hour in the morning he thought of making his post-mortem examination. Crossing the stable-yard for this purpose, the lawyer was accosted by Niccolò the groom, who was engaged in doing his office on a handsome bay mare at the stable-door.

Niccolò was the oldest servant in the establishment, having filled the same place he now held under the Marchese's father. He was an older man by several years than the Marchese Lamberto; and he it had been, who, when the present Marchese was a child of ten years old, had put him on his first pony, and been his riding-master. Old Niccolò, like every other old Italian servant of the old school, held, as the first and most important article of his creed, the unquestioning belief that the Castelmare family was the most noble, the most ancient, and in every respect the grandest in the world, and the Marchese Lamberto the greatest and most powerful man in it. He was a good sort of man in his way, was old Niccolò; went to confession regularly; and did his duty in that state of life to which it had pleased Providence to call him

according to his lights; was honest in his dealings; knew in a rough sort of way that veracity was good, and unverity bad, to such an extent as to understand that truth-telling should be the rule and lying the exception; and was faithful to the death to his employer.

Old Niccolò was also a very perfect specimen of the product of a peculiar way of thinking, which was a speciality of the rapidly disappearing class to which he belonged. He did not imagine for a moment, that the laws and rules of morality and duty, by which he had been taught, that he ought to regulate his own conduct, were at all applicable to his master. Even if he had ever troubled his mind by plunging so far into the depths of speculation, as to consider, that in truth the various matters forbidden in the commandments were in the sight of God, or, what was more within his ken, in the sight of the Church, equally forbidden to all men, still it would have been clear to him that there was no reason why such great people as the Marchese di Castelmare, with Cardinals for his friends, and wealth enough to pay for any quantity of indulgences and masses he might require, should not indulge in peccadilloes and vices which poorer folks cannot afford. Probably, however, he had never reached any such profundity of speculation. He saw that the Church and its ministers treated his superiors very differently from their treatment of him, and expected from him quite different conduct from that which they expected from them. And the result was an habitual and practical belief, that the great folks of the world, of whom he considered that his own master was unquestionably the greatest, were far above the

laws in every sort which were binding on himself and the like of him.

Nor of all the many acts which honest Niccolò would have scrupled to do on his own account, would he have hesitated a moment to become guilty at the command, or on the behoof of, his master. As for his own soul's weal, it probably was sufficiently safeguarded by the paramount nature of the duty which required him to do the will of his employer; or, in any case, what was his soul that any care for it should come into competition with the will of the Marchese Lamberto di Castelmare? Niccolò would have been profoundly ashamed at admitting to any one of his own class that the family he served were not so great and so masterful as to render it a matter of course that their will must override all other considerations whatsoever.

To old Niccolò it was indeed as a symptom of the end of all things—as a rising of the powers of darkness against the established order of God's world—that a Marchese di Castelmare should be arrested. It was incomprehensible to him. There was but one power great enough, as he understood matters, to accomplish so dread a catastrophe; and that was the power of the Marchese Lamberto himself. And he inclined accordingly to the belief, that if indeed the Marchese Ludovico were in prison, the truth was that for some inscrutable reason the Marchese Lamberto chose that so it should be.

"Is it really true, Signor Giovacchino," whispered the old man, coming close up to the lawyer, as the latter was crossing the stable-yard; "is it really true that the Marchese Ludovico has been put in prison?"



"Well, that much is true, I am afraid, Niccolò; but I hope it may not be for long," said Fortini, pausing in his walk, as though he were not unwilling to talk to the old man.

"Couldn't ye say a word to the Marchese, to take him out?" said the old groom coaxingly; "if so be as the woman is dead, what is the use of any more ado about it?"

"Well, I hope there may not be much more ado about it. She was probably killed, poor woman, by some strolling vagabonds. But I wish it had not happened to vex the Marchese just now. He is not well, the Marchese. Has he ridden much lately?"

"Hasn't backed a horse since the first week in Carnival," said the old groom emphatically.

"I hope he will take to his riding again, now Carnival is over. I think it helps to keep him in health," remarked the lawyer.

"I'm sure I wish he would, for my part," returned the groom; "and I wished it this morning, I can tell you. I was a-taking his own mare out this morning—it's a week since she has been out of the stable—and she was that fresh it was pretty well more than I could do to hold her. I brought her in all of a lather, and splashed with mud to her saddle-girths. People must ha' thought I had been riding a race,—that is, if any of them had seen me when I came into the yard; but there wasn't a soul of 'em stirring. Catch any of the lot up at that time the first morning in Lent."

"He is getting old, too. It would have been a mighty hard horse to ride that my friend Niccolò would not have been able to hold a year or two ago," thought the lawyer to himself, as he walked out of the

stable-yard into the little back street that runs behind the palazzo, and pursued his way thoughtfully towards the residence of the celebrated anatomist.

And again, as he walked, the lawyer turned his mind, with all the analytical power of which he was master, to the question whether or no there were any possibility of hope that the Marchese Ludovico were innocent of the crime imputed to him,—whether there were any other theory possible by virtue of which any other person might be suspected of the deed.

His anxiety to speak with Professor Tomosarchi indicated, indeed, that he had not wholly abandoned, despite what he had said on that point both to the Marchese Ludovico and his uncle, the hope that the death might be pronounced to have resulted from natural causes. Possibly, had the lawyer possessed more medical knowledge, this chance might have seemed to him a somewhat better one; but, to his thinking, it was altogether incredible that a healthy girl of Bianca's age should lie down to sleep, and, without any such change of position as would disorder her attire—without any evidence of a death-struggle—should simply never wake again. Again the lawyer's meditations told him that small hope was to be found in this direction.

Were there any persons in the city who might be supposed to feel enmity or ill-will towards the singer? Many a one of the young nobles had, doubtless, been kept at arms' length by Bianca in a manner that might easily be supposed to breed hatred in a vain and ill-conditioned heart. But murder—and such a murder! It was difficult to suppose that such a cause

---

should be sufficient to produce such an effect; yet vanity is a very strong and a very evil-counselling passion.

Vanity? Ha! could it be? Surely there never was so absurdly, so grossly, vain a creature, as that Conte Leandro? And the poor murdered Diva had quizzed, and snubbed, and mortified him again and again. The lawyer had heard that much; and Leandro was aware of the fact that Bianca was to be in the Pineta at that time. So much was clear from what the Marchese had said. But she was to be there with Ludovico—how could the poet expect to find her alone? Could it be that he had followed them merely for the sake of making mischief and rendering himself disagreeable, and had chanced to come upon her asleep and alone? Could *this* be the clue?

But it would surely be easy to ascertain to a certainty whether the Conte Leandro had left the city that morning or not. If only it could be shown that he had done so? The amount of probability that he had really been the perpetrator of the crime, or the possibility of convicting him of it, would signify comparatively little. It would be sufficient if only a competing theory, based on a possibility, could be set up; if only such an alternative possibility could be presented to the minds of the judges as should justify them in feeling that the matter was too doubtful to warrant a conviction.

Then, suddenly, as he thought on all the causes of hatred that Bianca might be supposed to have inspired, his mind reverted to those words which Signor Pietro Logarini, the head of the police, had let drop when speaking of the Signorina Paolina Foscarelli:—"Women,

who are fond of a man, don't like to see him with another woman, and a beautiful one, under the circumstances in which the Marchese might have been seen with Bianca."

That was the sense of the remark to which the Commissary had partially given utterance; and now the lawyer thought of it. He was tempted to believe that Logarini had been struck by the same idea that had before flashed into his mind almost with the force of a revelation.

Might it not have been the hand of the Venetian girl, maddened by jealousy, which had taken the life of her rival, while she slept?

Such a story would by no means be now told for the first time. Very far from it. Men had not now to learn *furens quid fœmina possit*.

Paolina was known to have left the city at that suspiciously strange hour of the morning. She was known to have been, at all events, at no very great distance from the spot where the crime was committed.

And was it not possible that, on the theory of Ludovico's innocence, the true explanation of the exclamation, which had escaped from him at the city gate, was to be found in supposing that he, too, had been struck by a similar thought? Might not that outcry on Paolina, uttered when the speaker knew well that it was Bianca and not Paolina that lay dead before him, have been forced from him by the sudden thought that she had done the deed then revealed to him?

For the first time the shrewd lawyer began to feel a real doubt as to the author of the crime. It might

---

be that the Marchesino was innocent after all,—that his account of the events of that morning, as far as he was concerned, was simply true. As his mind dwelt on the matter the case against Paolina seemed to acquire additional force. It could be proved that this girl had been deeply and seriously attached to the Marchese Ludovico. It could be proved that she had seen her lover *tête-à-tête* with so dangerous a rival as the singer in circumstances that she had every right to consider very suspicious. It could be proved that she had been not far from the spot where the murder was committed much about the time when the deed must have been done.

It is an essentially and curiously Italian characteristic that the lawyer's rapidly growing conviction that Paolina had indeed been the criminal was strengthened and made easier of acceptance to his mind by the fact that the suspected criminal was not a townswoman but a Venetian. It would have seemed less possible to him that a young Ravenna girl should have done such a deed. But one of those terrible Venetian women of whom so many blood-stained tales of passion and crime were on record!

Signor Fortini really began to think that his mind had strayed into the true path towards the solution of the mystery at last. And he was very much inclined to think that the germ of such a notion had already been deposited in the mind of the Police Commissioner.

In any case here was wherewithal to establish such a case of suspicion as should make it difficult for the tribunal to condemn the Marchesino on such evidence

as could be brought against him, supposing no new circumstances to be brought to light.

Not for that reason, however, was the lawyer disposed to relinquish the idea which had occurred to him as to the possibility of incriminating the Conte Leandro. The more circumstances of doubt it was possible to accumulate around the facts, so much the better.

Signor Fortini thought that he saw his way clearly enough to the means to showing that it was very presumable that the Conte Leandro had conceived a violent and bitter hatred of the murdered woman. It was enough to base a case for suspicion on. The lawyer had no idea that the poet had been the murderer. He did not dream of the possibility that he should be convicted of the crime. He had, doubtless, been quietly in bed in Ravenna at the hour it had been committed. But he might find it difficult to prove that he had *not* quitted the city on that Wednesday morning. And the suggestion of the possibility of his guilt would, at all events, be an element of doubt and difficulty the more.

With these thoughts in his mind Signor Fortini suddenly changed his immediate purpose of going to the Professore Tomosarchi; and determined to walk as far as the Porta Nuova and make inquiry himself of the people at the gate as to the testimony they might be able to give respecting Paolina's exit from the city at a very early hour on that morning. At the same time, it might be possible to lead them into imagining that they had seen some other passenger, who *might* have been the Conte Leandro. It was very desirable that this inquiry should be made without delay. For

it was no part of the duty of the gate officers to make any written note of such a circumstance; and it would entirely depend on their recollection to say whether such or such a person had passed the gate. At the same time, that such a person as this Paolina Foscarelli should pass out of the city at such an hour in the morning, was sufficiently out of the ordinary course of things to make it very unlikely that it should not be remembered by the officials.

As the lawyer pursued his way towards the gate in deep thought he was comforted as to the complexion of his client's case by the consideration of his own state of mind. He found it impossible to come to any definitive conclusion as to the balance of the probabilities. At one moment his mind swung back to his original conviction that the Marchese Ludovico had yielded to the temptation of making himself safe from the destitution that awaited him if his uncle's purpose were carried out. The persuasion that it was so seemed to come like a flash of light upon him. Then, again, thinking of all the stories of what women have done under the influence of a maddening jealousy, he reverted to the superior probability of the other hypothesis.

Arrived at the gate the lawyer's success was greater than he had ventured to anticipate. *Both* the persons respecting whom he made inquiry had been seen to pass out of the city at a very early hour that morning.

To his great surprise he heard that the Conte Leandro had passed the gate before it was daylight; and the officer had been struck by the strangeness of the circumstance. He was much muffled up in a large cloak, with a broad-brimmed hat drawn down over his

eyes and face. But his person was perfectly well known to the official; and he had recognized him without difficulty.

He also perfectly well remembered seeing the girl—a remarkably pretty girl—pass through about an hour or a little more afterwards. And, imagining that the one circumstance explained the other—that it was an affair of some assignation outside the city in the interest of some amourette that was attended by difficulties within the walls—he had thought no more about it.

But Signor Fortini knew enough to feel very sure, that the exceedingly singular facts, as they seemed to him, of both these persons having gone out of the city in the direction of the Pineta at such an unusual hour, was not to be accounted for by any such explanation. But neither did it seem in any degree likely or credible, that these two facts, the passing out of the Conte Leandro, and the passing out of Paolina, should have had any connection with each other in reference to the murder in the Pineta.

It was strange, very strange!

It was so strange and unaccountable that Signor Fortini felt that, unless some fresh circumstances should be brought to light beyond those which had as yet become known either to him, or to the police, it was safe to predict that the tribunal would not have the means of coming to any conclusion concerning the author of the murder.

The lawyer turned away from the gate, and strolled through the streets without any intention as to the direction in which he walked, so deeply was he pondering upon the possibilities that were brought within his



mental vision by the extraordinary facts he had ascertained.

He would almost have preferred, he thought, as he pursued his way profoundly musing, that it should have been shown that one only, instead of *both* the persons towards whom the possibilities he had imagined, pointed, had gone at that strange hour towards the locality of the crime.

Nevertheless, as he said to himself, the more doubt, the more elements of difficulty, the better. In truth the chance seemed to be a very good one, that it might *never* be known who gave that wretched girl her death.

## CHAPTER VI.

At the Circolo again.

At the Circolo that evening there was no lack of subject for conversation, as may be easily imagined. The rooms were very full, and every tongue was busy with the same topic.

"For my part I don't believe that La Bianca is dead at all. What proof have we of the fact? Somebody has been told that somebody else heard some other pumpkin-head say so. Report, *signori miei*, is an habitual liar, and I for one never believe a word she says without evidence of the truth of it," said the Conte Luigi Spadoni, a man who was known to make a practice of reading French novels, and was therefore held to be an *esprit fort* and a philosopher, in accordance with which character he always professed indiscriminate disbelief in everything.

"Oh come, Spadoni, that won't do this time. Bah.

you are the only living soul in the town that don't believe it then. Evidence, *per Dio!* Go and ask the men at the Porta Nuova, who received the body, when the *contadini* brought it in," cried a dozen voices at once.

"But Spadoni has the weakness of being so excessively credulous," said a bald young man with gold spectacles, looking up from a game of chess he was playing in a corner.

"Who, I? I credulous? That is a good one! Why I said, man alive, that I *disbelieved* it," cried Spadoni, eagerly.

"I know it, and very credulous indeed it seems to me, to believe that all the people, who say they have seen the *prima donna's* dead body, should be mistaken in such a fact, or conspiring without motive to declare it falsely. I call that very credulous," said the chess-player, quietly.

"Did you ever see such an addle-pate. He can't understand the difference between believing and disbelieving," rejoined Spadoni triumphantly, and carrying the great bulk of the bystanders with him.

"But as to the poor girl being dead, there is unhappily no shadow of doubt at all," said the Baron Manutoli; "I saw old Signor Fortini the lawyer just now, who told me that he was at the Porta Nuova when the body was brought in."

"And is it true that the Marchese Ludovico was with him, and fainted dead away at the sight of the body?" said a very young man.

"It is true that Ludovico was there with Fortini at the gate, but I heard nothing about his fainting; and should not think it very likely."

"Well, I don't know about that. I should have thought it likely enough by all accounts," said the Conte Leandro Lombardoni, whose face was looking more pasty and his eyes more fishy than usual.

"Much *you* know about it. Why, in the name of all the saints, should it be likely? What should Ludovico faint for?" rejoined Manutoli, fiercely.

"What for? Well, one has heard of such things. And as for what I know about it, Signor Barone, maybe I have the means of knowing more about it than anybody here," said the poet.

"Here is Lombardoni confesses he knows all about it," cried one.

"That ought to be told to the Commissary of Police," said another.

"I say, my notion is that Leandro did it himself," exclaimed a third.

"Ah, to be sure. What is more likely? We all know how the poor Diva snubbed him. Remember the fate of his verses. If that is not enough to drive a man and a poet to do murder I don't know what is. To be sure, 'twas Leandro did it," rejoined the first.

"I can believe that, if I never believe anything else," said Spadoni.

"Let's send to the Commissary and tell him that the Conte Leandro confesses that it was he that murdered La Bianca," cried one of the previous speakers.

"What on earth are you dreaming of," cried the persecuted poet, turning ghastly livid with affright; "I know nothing about the matter, nothing! How in the world should I know anything about it?"

"Oh, I thought you knew more about it than anybody else just now," sneered one of his persecutors.

"He looks to me very much as if he *did* know something about it in sober earnest," said the bald-headed chess-player; who had been looking hard at the evidences of terror on the poet's face.

"But where is the Marchese Ludovico?" asked the same young man, who had heard that the Marchese had fainted at the sight of the body.

A general silence fell on the chattering group at this question: till Manutoli answered with a very grave face: "Ah, you must ask the Commissary of Police that question, Signor Marco."

"You don't mean that he is arrested?" returned the youngster thus addressed.

Manutoli nodded his head two or three times gravely, as he said, "That is the worst of the bad business; and a very bad business it is in every way."

"You don't mean that you think Ludovico can have done it, Manutoli?" said one of the others.

"No, I don't say I think so. I don't know what to think. I should have said, that I was just as likely to do such a thing myself, as Ludovico di Castelmare. But if there is any truth in what is said, that the Marchese Lamberto was going to marry the girl, it looks very ugly. God knows what a man might be driven to do in such a case."

"I suppose if the old Marchese were to marry and have children, Ludovico would have about the same fortune as the old blind man that sits at the door of the Cathedral?" asked the previous speaker.

"Just about as much. He would be absolutely a

---

beggar," said the Conte Leandro, who appeared to find considerable pleasure in the announcement.

"I think, that if that was the case, and Ludovico had put the unlucky girl out of the way, it would be the Marchese Lamberto who ought to bear the blame of it. An old fellow has no right to behave in that sort of way," said one of the group.

"Of course he has not. To bring a fellow up to the age of Ludovico in the expectation that he is to have the family property; and then to take it into his head to marry when he is past fifty. If Ludovico had put a knife into him instead of into the girl, I should have said that it served him right," said another.

"And what was the good of murdering the girl? If the old fellow wants to be married, he will marry some other girl if not this one. Girls are plenty enough," said a third.

"Ay, but not such girls as La Bianca; what a lovely creature she was! I don't wonder at the Marchese being caught by her, for my part, seeing her every day as he did," remarked a fourth.

"Bah, girls are plenty enough, as Gino said, and pretty girls too. And if the Marchese was minded to marry, it wasn't the murder of this poor girl that would stop him," said one of the others.

"And that is a strong reason, as it strikes me, for thinking that Ludovico had nothing to do with it. He must have known, as well as we, that it was likely enough his uncle would find somebody else," remarked Manutoli.

"Well, we shall see. But I would wager a good round sum that Ludovico did it," said the Conte

Leandro; who had by that time recovered his tranquillity.

"Oh, now here's Leandro, who begins to think again that he does know something about it," said the Barone Manutoli.

"I said nothing of the sort, Signor Barone. How should I know? But everybody may have his opinion, and that is mine. We shall see by-and-by," returned Leandro, waspishly.

"I'll tell you what, *signori miei*," said Manutoli; "let it turn out as it may, it is the saddest and worst affair that has been seen in Ravenna for many a day. I won't admit the thought, for my part, that the Marchese Ludovico has really committed this murder. I should prefer to suppose, that some vagabonds had done it for the sake of robbery, and had been disturbed before they could carry out their purpose, or anything. But it is a very sad affair. I would have done I don't know what, rather than that it should have happened. Think what will be said. That's what an artist gets by venturing to Ravenna. You will see the noise that will be made all over Italy."

"But why does it follow that anybody is to blame at all? Why may she not have put herself to death?" said one of the previous speakers.

"A suicide! that is a new idea. But it does not seem a very promising one. Why should she kill herself? She was in the full tide of success, and had just received an offer of marriage, if what we hear is true, from the richest man in Ravenna. Is it likely that she should choose just that moment to make away with herself?" replied another.

"In any case the doctors will know what to tell

us about that. They can always tell whether anybody has killed themselves or been murdered by somebody else."

"By the way, Signor Barone, have you heard whether the medical report has been made yet? But I suppose the police would not let us know what the doctor's opinion was, if it *had* been made. Who knows who has been employed to examine the body?"

"I know!" answered the Baron Manutoli, "the Professore Tomosarchi. And whatever can be found out by examining the body, he will find out, depend upon it. I was asking about it just now. The examination will take place to-morrow morning."

"But who ever heard of such a thing as going off to the Pineta at that time in the morning, and after being up all night at a ball too?" said Lombardoni, spitefully. "Why, it looks as if a man must have had some scheme, some out-of-the-way motive of some kind to do such a thing."

"Not at all," returned Manutoli, angrily; "I don't see that at all. A charmingly imagined frolic, I should say, a capital wind-up for a last night of carnival. I should have liked it myself."

"And then," said one of the others, "one can't refuse such a girl as La Bianca. And it's two to one that she asked Ludovico to take her, for a lark."

"But I happen to know," said Leandro, quickly, "that it was he who proposed it to her. He persuaded her to go."

"And how in the world do you know that, pray?" asked Manutoli, turning sharply upon him.

"I—I heard it said. I was told so. I am sure I don't know who it was said so. Nobody has been

talking about anything else. Some fellow or other said that Ludovico had proposed the trip to her."

"The fact is, in short, that you know just nothing at all about it. You happen to know, forsooth! It seems to me, Signor Conte, that you are strangely ready to fancy you know anything that might seem to go against Ludovico," rejoined Manutoli.

"And what would be the result if it should turn out that he was guilty—if he were condemned?" asked one of the younger men, looking afraid of his own words, as he spoke them.

"God knows,—the galleys, I suppose. But one must not imagine such a thing. It is too frightful," said Manutoli.

"Horrible! Shocking! Impossible!" cried a chorus of voices.

"Good God! Result! The disgrace and destruction of the noblest family in the province. The ending of a fine old name in infamy. Gracious heaven, it is too horrible to think of," exclaimed Manutoli, with much emotion.

"It would kill the old Marchese as dead as a door-nail, for one thing," said another of the group of young men.

"And serve him right too. If it is really true that he has contemplated being guilty of such a monstrous piece of injustice and folly," said the same man, who had before expressed a similar opinion.

Just then a servant of the Circolo came into the room and put a note into the hands of the Baron Manutoli.

"It is from Ludovico, asking me to go to him. So there's an end to our game of billiards, Signor

---



between the young men, "of course I knew I should see you here before long; and my note was to call you at once, instead of waiting to see you in the morning, because I want you to do something for me before you sleep this night—something that I don't want to wait for till to-morrow morning."

"To be sure, my dear fellow, anything; I am ready for anything, if it takes all night."

"Thanks. Well, now, look here: I am innocent of this deed——"

*"S' intende; of course you are."*

*"S' intende, of course; that's just the worst of it. It is so much a matter of course that I should say I had not done it if I had, that my saying so is of no use at all. Nevertheless, to you I must say that I neither did it nor have I the slightest conception or suspicion who did. And you may guess that the fact itself is a horror and a grief to me that I shall never get over, putting this dreadful suspicion of my own guilt out of the question. A horror and a grief, and a remorse, too; for if I had not moved away from her the tragedy could not have happened."*

"I really do not see that you need blame yourself for——"

"I ought not to have left her side. Yet, God knows, it never entered my head to dream of the possibility of any harm; all seemed so still, so peaceful, so utterly quiet; yet, at that moment, the hand that did the deed could not have been far off."

"Let the circumstances have been what they might," resumed Manutoli, after a moment's pause, "nobody would have dreamed of connecting you with the deed had it not been for the strong motive which seems so

clear and intelligible to every fool who sets his brains to work on the matter. I suppose it is true that you had been informed of your uncle's intention to offer the poor girl marriage?"

"True that I had been told of it, for the first time, by herself during our drive, poor girl."

"Ah—h—h! To think of such a man being guilty of such insane folly—and of all the misery that is likely to grow out of it. How on earth did she ever contrive to get such a fatal influence over him?"

"She schemed for it from her first arrival here—aimed avowedly to herself at nothing less than inducing the Marchese di Castelmare to marry her—and succeeded. For all that, I'll tell you what, Adolfo—there was a great deal more good in that poor girl than you would have thought."

"Bah! Good in her— Well, she's gone. She has had her reward, poor soul; and I pity her with all my heart. But as for the good in her——"

"There *was* good in her, and not a little. I tell you that if you or any one else could have heard all that passed between us, I should hardly be suspected of having murdered her, poor girl."

"That is likely enough; but——"

"Do you know, Manutoli, I have a very strong idea that if this had not happened, the marriage with the Marchese would never have come off?"

"You think that, between us all, we should have induced him to listen to reason?"

"I don't know about that; I was not thinking of that; I think that Bianca would have been induced to listen to reason; I think that the scheme would have come to nothing through her renunciation of it."

"When, according to your own account, she had been scheming all the time she has been here to bring it about?" said Manutoli, with arched eyebrows.

"Yes, even so. She had never known—how should she?—that such a marriage would turn me out on the world a beggar; she had never known what sort and what degree of misery and ruin it would bring about to all parties."

"And you told her this?"

"Yes, in some degree I told her. As to the effect of such a marriage on myself, I told her simply the entire truth."

"And you are disposed to think that the Diva—No, poor girl! I didn't mean to speak sneeringly of her. She has paid for her fault a heavier penalty than it deserved, any way. You are disposed to think, then, that she would have given up the prize of all her scheming—this marriage, which was to have given her everything in the world that she could desire, and more than she could have ever dreamed of attaining; she would have voluntarily relinquished all this, you think, for your sake?"

"I'll tell you what it is, Manutoli. A man can never appreciate,—can never fathom, the depth of a woman's generosity till he has tried it."

"But, *caro mio*,—after all I don't want to be hard upon her, poor soul, God knows!—but to expect generosity on such a point from such a woman——"

"You may say what you will, Manutoli. I know what she was, poor girl, as well as you do—better, a great deal; for, I tell you, that there was a real generosity in her nature. Look here," continued Ludovico, after a pause of a minute or two, "I would not say it

to anybody else than you, or to you either, except under circumstances that make one wish to state the whole truth exactly as it was. It seems so coxcomb-like,—so like what our friend Leandro would say; but I may say it to you. The fact is, I have a kind of idea that that poor Bianca was inclined to like me. She cried when I told her——”

“Aha, *j’y suis!* Now I begin to be able to fathom the depth of a woman’s generosity. Given the fact of becoming Marchesa di Castelmare, the lady was not disinclined to become so by catching the nephew instead of the uncle; and small blame to her.”

“You do not do the poor woman justice, Manutoli.”

“Any way, I do you justice; and I know you well enough, Ludovico mio, to understand that the *generosity* of such a girl as this poor Lalli was, taking that special form, must have been very touching to you.”

“You forget, Manutoli, how little accessible I was to the flattery of any such preference, with my whole heart full of a very different person.”

“And I was just thinking, to tell you the truth, how the little scene in the *bagarino* would have struck that other person if she could have seen La Bianca giving you to understand, amid her tears, upon what terms she would consent not to come between you and your natural inheritance.”

“That other person *did* see us in the *bagarino*; and that brings me to the motive which led me to beg you to come to me this evening. Somehow or other, it has become known to these people here that Paolina went out of the Porta Nuova at a very early hour this morning. The fact is, that she simply went to see whether the scaffolding, which I had had prepared for her

---

copying work there, was all right, and ready for her to begin her task there; and all that can be proved, of course. But the same idea that occurred to you just now, that Paolina might not have liked to see me driving with La Bianca, has suggested itself to some other wiseacre,—I beg your pardon, Manutoli,—and it seems that an absurd notion—a notion the monstrous absurdity of which is a matter of amazement to me—has been engendered that my poor Paolina may have been the perpetrator of the crime. The idea! If they only knew her! But the Commissary here has been cross-questioning me in a way that shows that is the notion he has in his head. Whether they know that Paolina really did see us in the *bagarino* together—she did so from the window in the Church of St. Apollinare—or whether they only know that she left the city by that gate early in the morning, I can't tell; but it is sure to be found out that she did really see us,—the more so, that she will say so to the first person who asks her, the poor innocent darling. And what I want you to do is to see her, and prepare her, poor child, for the possibility of being arrested, and make her understand that no harm can possibly come to her. Try to save her from being frightened. She knows well enough, just as well as I know myself, that *I* have not done this thing. Try to make her understand that a little time only is necessary for the finding out of the real culprit; that it is sure to be discovered, and that, as far as we are concerned, it is all sure to come right."

"You wish me to go to her at once?"

"Yes, if you would be so kind. What I am anxious for is that you should see her before any order for her arrest shall have been issued. But that

is not all. I want you to see Fortini also. I want you to ascertain from him how far it is possible or probable that any suspicion may rest on Paolina in consequence of the facts which are known; how far it is likely that any attempt may be made to set up a case against her. And I want you to tell him that it will be wholly and utterly vain to make any such attempt, that the result would only be entirely to cripple my own defence. For you must understand once for all, and make him understand once for all, that rather than allow her to be convicted of a deed of which she is as innocent as you are, I would confess myself to be the guilty party. It shall not be, Manutoli,—mark what I say, it shall not be,—that she shall be dragged to ruin and destruction by my misfortune, or imprudence, call it what you will. Of this, of course, you will say no word to her. But I beg you to leave no shade of a doubt as to my settled purpose in this matter on the mind of Signor Fortini. It is he, of course, who will have the duty of preparing and conducting my defence; and it is essential that he should understand this rightly. Will you do this for me?"

"Of course I will—this or anything else that I can do for you. But I can't undertake to say what Signor Giovacchino Fortini may think, or say, or do in the matter, you know. I will take your message, and then, of course, you will see him yourself in the course of to-morrow morning. Of course, old fellow, I need not tell you that I am sure you did not murder the girl; but it is altogether one of the most mysterious things I ever heard of. Nevertheless my notion is that we shall find out the culprit yet. And you may

depend on it that two-thirds of the whole population of the town will be moving heaven and earth to get some clue to the mystery for your sake."

"It seems to me, too, that such a deed cannot but be found out. I should be more uneasy than I am, did I not console myself with thinking so. Now go to Paolina, there is a dear good fellow."

"One word more—shall I see the Marchese?"

"I think, perhaps, it is best not to do so. Of course Fortini has been with him, and told him everything. I almost thought that I should have seen him here this evening; but, under the circumstances, I am better pleased that he should stay away. Better leave him to Fortini."

"Good-night, then."

"Good-night. You will let me see you to-morrow?"

"I won't fail. Good-night."

## CHAPTER VIII.

Signor Giovacchino Fortini at Home.

THE Baron Manutoli was Ludovico di Castelmare's very good friend. But there are two sorts of friends;—friends who show their friendship by wishing, and endeavouring to obtain for us, what we wish for ourselves; and friends, whose friendship consists in wishing for us things analogous to what they wish for themselves;—who endeavour to procure for us, not what we wish, but what they consider to be good for us.

Now the Baron Manutoli belonged to the latter of these two categories. He was some years older than

Ludovico; had been a married man, and was now a widower with one little boy, the future Baron Manutoli; and considered himself as having been blessed with a supreme and exceptional degree of good fortune, with regard to all that appertained to that difficult and often disastrous chapter of human destinies which concerns the relations of mankind with the other sex. Happiness and advantages, ordinarily incompatible and exclusive of each other, had in his case by a kind destiny been made compatible. For the representative of an old noble family to remain single, was bad in many points of view. But on the other hand—when one's ancestral acres are not so extensive as they once were, and in nowise more productive—when one likes a quiet life enlivened by a moderate degree of bachelor's liberty,—when one sees the interiors of divers of one's contemporaries and friends,—when one thinks of mothers-in-law, and sisters-in-law, and a whole ramified family-in-law!—the Baron Manutoli, though he had grieved over the loss of his young wife when the loss was recent, was now, after some ten years of widower's life, inclined to think that of the man, who had a legitimately born son to inherit his name and estate, who had done his duty towards society by taking a wife, and who was yet enabled to enjoy all the ease and freedom from care of a bachelor's life, it might be said, "Omne tulit punctum."

Far as he was from undervaluing the importance of the social duties of a man and a nobleman in respect to these matters, he had always been an earnest advocate of the marriage which Ludovico was expected to make with the Contessa Violante; and had regarded poor Paolina, from the first, as an intruder and dis-



astrous mischief-maker; and Ludovico's love for her as the unlucky caprice of a boy, respecting which, the evident duty of all friends was to do all they could to discourage it, put it down, and get rid of it.

So that in the matter of the commission which Ludovico had entrusted to him, the Baron was likely enough to have somewhat different views from those of his friend.

What a happy turning of misfortune into a blessing it would be, if this shocking affair should be the means of getting rid of this unlucky Paolina altogether! Not, of course, that the Baron was capable of wishing that such getting rid of should be accomplished by the unjust condemnation of the poor girl for such a crime. God forbid! But, if there should be found to be a sufficient degree of suspicion—of unexplainable mystery—to cause the exoneration of Ludovico, and at the same time, an intimation to the Venetian stranger that she would do well to remove herself from the happy territory of the Holy Father, what a Godsend it would be!

Then, again, as to the real fact of Paolina's innocence, Manutoli was seriously disposed to think that there might be grounds for considerable doubt. Ludovico's assertions to that effect were of course unworthy of the slightest attention; the mere ravings of a man in love. Of course, also, the menace he held out, that if any attempt were made to throw the onus of the crime on Paolina, he would meet it by avowing himself guilty, was as entirely to be disregarded. The paramount business in hand was to clear his friend of this untoward complication in the matter of the crime which had so mysteriously been committed. The next

consideration was to set him equally free from his entanglement with Paolina. And with these thoughts in his mind, the Baron decided that, upon the whole, it would be better that he should have an interview with lawyer Fortini, before making his visit to the lady.

He knew that it was too late to look for the lawyer at his "studio;" and therefore went directly to his residence, where he found the old gentleman just concluding his solitary supper. Being the evening of Ash Wednesday, the meal had consisted of a couple of eggs, and a morsel of tunny fish preserved in oil, very far from a bad relish for a flask of good wine. And the lawyer was, when Manutoli came in, aiding his meditations by discussing the remaining half of a small cobwebbed bottle of the very choicest growth of the Piedmontese hills.

"I owe you a thousand apologies, Signor Fortini, for coming to trouble you with business, and very disagreeable business too, here and at such an hour," began the Baron; "but the interest we all feel——"

"Not a word of apology is needed, Signor Barone. About this shocking affair in the Pineta, of course, of course? *Pur troppo*, we are all interested, as you say. Will you honour my poor house, Signor Barone, by tasting what there is in the cellar? I ought to be ashamed to offer this wine, my ordinary drink at supper, to the Barone Manutoli"—(the old fellow knew right well that there was not such another glass of wine in all the city, and that it was rarely enough that his noble guest drank such)—"but it is drinkable." And so saying, he called to his old housekeeper to bring another bottle and a fresh glass before he would allow Manu-

---

"Ay, that is the question. For what possible purpose? But the fact is certain. Though endeavouring to conceal himself by means of his cloak, he was perfectly well recognized by the men at the gate. For what possible purpose? No doubt you know, Signor Barone, much better than I, who am not much in the way of hearing of such things—unless in cases where I make it my business to hear of them, you understand, Signor Barone,—you, no doubt, know that the Signor Conte has been besieging, as I may say, this poor Lalli woman with his attentions and verses ever since she came here; also, that the lady would have nothing to say to him or to his verses—that she has, in short, snubbed him and mortified his vanity in the sight of all the town during the whole of the past Carnival."

"That is true—it is all true," cried Manutoli, eagerly, and looking almost scared by the ideas the lawyer was presenting to his mind. "It is even truer than you, perhaps, are aware of. She said sneering and cutting things of him in his hearing both at the Marchese Lamberto's ball and at the Circolo ball; I happen to know it."

"Hey—y—y—y?" said the lawyer, uttering a sound like a long sigh, with a question stop at the end of it; and then thrusting out his lips and nodding his head up and down slowly while he plunged his hands into the pockets of his trowsers. "I'll tell you what it is, Signor Barone," the old man added, after a pause of deep thought, "I was anxious to find such plausible grounds of suspicion against other parties, such elements of doubt, such possibilities as might make it difficult for the judges to condemn our friend. I wanted to

puzzle the court; but, *per Bacco!* I have puzzled myself. This afternoon, I confess to you, I had little doubt but that the Marchesino had, in a fatal moment of anger and desperation, committed the crime. But, upon my word now, I know not what to think. Here we have three parties, each of whom we know to have been acted on by one of three strong passions. We have jealousy, and wounded vanity. Which of the three has done the deed?"

"It is an extraordinary circumstance," said the Baron Manutoli, "that they were jeering at the Conte Leandro at the Circolo just now, about the way the Diva had snubbed him and his verses, and accusing him in joke of having been her murderer. And, as sure as I am now speaking to you, Signor Fortini, he looked in a way then that I—a—a—in short that I thought very odd—turned all sorts of colours. But then, you know, he is always such an unwholesome-looking animal."

"One of the vainest men I ever met with," said the lawyer, musing.

"Oh—for vanity—I believe you. Leandro has not his equal for vanity."

"And strong vanity, deeply wounded, by a woman too, will breed a hate as violent and vicious, perhaps, as any passion that ever prompted a crime," rejoined the lawyer, still meditating deeply. "*Per Dio Santo!*" he exclaimed, after a pause of silence, striking his open palm strongly on the table, as he spoke, and speaking with a sort of solemn earnestness, "I am inclined to think, after all, that he is the man. The Marchesino," he went on again, thoughtfully, "went out for a frolic—intelligible enough. The girl went

---

out to look after the preparations for her work—again quite plausible. But in the name of all the saints what took the Conte Leandro out of the Porta Nuova at that hour of the morning, after passing the night at a ball?”

“I still think that the Venetian girl has done the deed,” said Manutoli, whose opinion was no doubt in some degree warped by his desire that the criminal should turn out to be a foreign plebeian rather than a Ravenna noble. “After all Leandro is not the man to do such a deed. He is such a poor creature. Besides, it seems to me that the girl’s motive for hate was the stronger. I don’t know that wounded vanity has had many such crimes to answer for, whereas jealousy—and such a jealousy—why, it is an old story, you know.”

“Well, we shall see. Any way, I am very much more easy as to the result. Short of such evidence as it seems very highly unlikely should be forthcoming, I do not think that there can be any conviction at all. It is most extraordinary that in the case of such a deed, done in such a place, at such a time, there should be so many persons so fairly liable to strong suspicion.”

“Of course, to produce the result we wish, a case must be set up against Leandro?” said the Baron.

“Of course. Leave that to me, or rather to the police. No doubt their inquiries have already put them on his track. The fact of his having gone out of the city by that gate, at that hour, is quite enough.”

“And now I must be off to see this Signorina Foscarelli. I don’t half like the job.”

"I daresay you will find her easy enough," said the lawyer, not quite understanding the nature of Manutoli's distaste for his errand. "Good-night, Signor Barone."

## CHAPTER IX.

### The Post-Mortem Examination.

THE Baron Manutoli found Paolina quite as "easy" as the lawyer had imagined that he would find her; but his task was not altogether an easy one in the sense he had himself intended. She made not the slightest difficulty of telling him, that when she had seen Ludovico and Bianca drive past the church towards the forest she had felt a strong temptation to follow them thither; she told him all about the conversation she had had with the old monk, and repeated the directions she had received from him as to the path by which she might reach the Pineta, and return that way towards the city, without coming back into the high-road, till she got near the walls. She confessed that, when she had followed the path behind the church leading to the Pineta, for some little distance, she had changed her mind, and had turned off by another path, which had brought her back into the high-road not far from the church; and she said that she had then walked on till she came near the walls, where she turned aside to sit down on one of the benches under the trees of the little promenade; that she had sat there for some time—she did not know how long; had then gone in to the Cardinal Legate's chapel, where she had conversed with the

---

Contessa Violante, whom she knew from having often met her there before; and had at last returned home at a very much later hour than she had expected, and had found her friend Signora Orsola Steno uneasy at her prolonged absence.

"And did you mention to the Contessa the shocking fact of the *prima donna's* death?" asked Manutoli, suddenly, thinking that he was doing a very sharp bit of lawyerly business in laying this trap for Paolina.

"How was it possible that I should do so, when I knew nothing about it till Ludovico told me several hours later?" answered the girl, with an unembarrassed easiness and readiness that almost changed Manutoli's opinion as to the probability of her guilt.

He reminded himself, however, that the same woman, who could be capable of such a deed might also be expected to have the presence of mind and readiness necessary for avoiding any such trap as that which he had laid for her.

He was, at the same time, strongly, but perhaps not altogether consistently, impressed with the fact, that during the whole of his interview with her, she did not once distinctly and directly deny that she had had anything to do with the crime. When warning her, as he had been charged by Ludovico to do, of the probability that she might be arrested, he had allowed her to understand that the circumstances of the case were such, that the question of who was the guilty person became nearly an alternative one between herself and the Marchese. On which, instead of protesting her own innocence, she had strongly insisted on that of Ludovico, which seemed a very suspicious circumstance to the Baron Manutoli.

He had tried to lead her to express some feeling, or, rather, some remembrance of what had been her feeling when she saw Ludovico and La Bianca in the *bagarino* together; but there she became reticent, and would say little or nothing—another suspicious circumstance in the eyes of the Baron, so that, when he quitted her, he was, upon the whole, rather confirmed than otherwise in his previous opinion as to her guilt.

"Well, Signorina," he had said, in rising to leave her, "I came here, in compliance with my friend's request, to re-assure you on the subject of the warrant which will, in all probability, be issued to-morrow morning for your arrest. You best know whether you have any reason for alarm. My own opinion is, that if you have nothing to reproach yourself with, you have nothing to fear. I trust it may be so."

"I am grateful to you for coming, Signor," Paolina said. "You will see Ludovico again. Tell him that I am as sure of his innocence of this horrid thing as if he had never quitted my side."

How Paolina passed that miserable night it is useless to attempt to tell. How happy all, ay, even all, the days of her previous life seemed to her in comparison with the misery of the minutes that were then so slowly passing.

Early the next morning Signor Fortini called at the house of his friend Dr. Buonaventura Tomosarchi, the great anatomist, for the purpose of accompanying the Professor to the room at the hospital, where the body of Bianca was awaiting the post-mortem examination which had been ordered by the police.

"I suppose," said Fortini, as they walked together,



"that there is no possibility, in such a case as this, that the death may have been a natural one?"

"Oh, I would not say that at all. Such things occur at all ages. I do not think it is likely,—specially in the case of such a magnificent organization as that of yonder poor girl; but there is no saying, and, above all, no use in attempting to guess when we shall so soon know all about it," said the Professor, a man some ten or fifteen years younger than the old lawyer.

"Is it possible that death may have been caused by foul means, yet by such as may elude your investigation?" asked Fortini.

"I think not—I should say almost certainly not in such a case as the present. There are poisons that act subtly and instantaneously, but there is the odour in most cases,—in almost all some indication of their operation on the organization."

Arrived at the hospital they found a couple of assistants, pupils of the Professor, awaiting his arrival. There was also an official on the part of the police, and there were two or three persons waiting in the hope of being allowed to be present at the examination. The police officer, however, very summarily declared that this could not be permitted. Fortini was so well known, and held such a kind of half-official position and character in the city, that he passed on unquestioned on the arm of the Professor.

The body lay exactly as it had been brought in by the labouring-men who had found it in the Pineta. The beautiful face was perfectly calm, and in the lineaments of it the difference that there is between death and sleep was scarcely perceptible. The white

'dress was almost as unruffled and as spotless as when she had put it on. It had been fastened about midway between the neck and the waist by a diamond pin or brooch; but this fastening was now undone, and the brooch was hanging loosely on one side of the bosom of the dress. It was impossible to suppose that this jewel should have been so left by anybody who had had the opportunity and the desire of plunder. It might have been unfastened by the wearer before she slept for the sake of more full enjoyment of the balmy breezes of the pine-forest: and the result of this loosening of the dress was that the light folds of it opened freely as far down as the waist, so that the slightest drawing aside of them, such as even the breeze might effect, was sufficient to leave bare the entire bosom.

On either shoulder and on the bosom lay the large heavy waves of the rich auburn hair. In death, as she had been in life, she was still a wonder of beauty; and the two men, the old lawyer and the Professor, little as, from years, character, and habits of mind, their imaginations were susceptible of being deeply touched by such a sight, stood for awhile by the side of the table on which the body had been laid, and gazed in sad silence on the sight before them.

"One might think she was still sleeping, poor creature," said the lawyer, after a silence of a few minutes.

"Ay, almost. It is a wonderfully lovely face. Seems difficult to believe, doesn't it, that any man—much less such a man as the Marchese—should have stood over that figure, and so looking down on it, have decided on destroying it?" said the Professor.

"Perhaps no man did so," said the lawyer.

"Case of death from natural causes, you mean? I am afraid not, I am afraid not. Can't say for certain yet; but, judging from appearances, I fear there is no likelihood that such was the case," rejoined the Professor.

"I was not thinking of that," replied Fortini. "I meant that what a man could hardly have had the heart to do might, perhaps, have been done by a woman. Beauty is not, I fancy, always found to produce quite the same sort of effect on another female as it is wont to produce on the other sex."

"Might have been done by a woman? That seems hardly likely, I think, *caro mio*. In the Pineta at that hour of the morning? *Che!* What woman is likely to have been there?"

"Well, we happen to know that there *was* a woman very near the spot where the crime was committed at the time that it was committed."

"You don't say so?" interrupted the anatomist. "Good heavens! This is quite new to me, and, of course, most important. I am delighted to hear what seems to cast so strong a doubt on the guilt of the Marchesino."

"And that is not all. We know further," continued the lawyer, eagerly, "that the woman in question had the strongest of all the possible motives that ever influence a female mind to hate—to desire the death of this poor girl that now lies here. The question is, whether this death was caused by any means which a woman—a young girl—may be supposed to have used," said the lawyer.

"Ha! a case of jealousy, I suppose? You don't

mean it. God knows, I should be more glad than I will say if there were any means of showing that the Marchese Ludovico had no hand in the matter. If it were brought home to him it would kill my old friend the Marchese Lamberto outright; I do believe it would kill him."

"I thought at first, to tell you the truth, Signor Professore, that it must have been the Marchesino who did the deed; the circumstances seemed so terribly strong against him. But—certain facts have come to my knowledge—in short, I begin to have very great hopes that he was in reality wholly innocent of it; and still greater hopes that if we cannot succeed in bringing the crime home to any other party, yet that the difficulty and doubt hanging about the case will be so great that all conviction will be impossible."

"A woman, you tell me? A young woman, I suppose, from what you say?" said the Professor, inquiringly.

"Yes; a young woman, and, as I am told, a very pretty one—a certain young girl—a Venetian artist, of the name of Foscarelli—Paolina Foscarelli, with whom it seems the Marchesino was foolish enough to fall in love. Well, this girl sees the Marchese and Bianca driving out alone together at that time in the morning to the Pineta—that much we know—sees them cheek by jowl together in a little *bagarino*, doing heaven only knows what—biling and cooing. Now it seems to me that she would, under these circumstances, be likely to feel not altogether kindly towards the lady in possession, eh, Signor Professore? You know the nature of the creatures better than I do; what do *you* think about it?"

"Similar little accidents have produced as terrible results before now—ay, many a time, there is no denying that. If we can ascertain *how* the deed was done it will be likely enough to throw some light on the probabilities of the case," returned the Professor, proceeding to scrutinize carefully the body as it lay before in any way disturbing the position or the garments.

"Ha! what have we here?" he cried, as he perceived, and, at the same time, pointed out the existence of a very small red spot upon the white dress just above the waistband. In an instant, as he spoke, he whipped out a powerful magnifying-glass, and carefully examined the tell-tale spot by its aid.

"Yes, that is a spot of blood—blood sure enough! but it is very singular that there should be such a minute spot, and no more; no, I can find no further trace," he added, after a careful and minute examination of every part of the dress.

"Might not any trifling accident—the most insignificant thing in the world—produce such a mere spot as that—a scratched finger—either her own or another person's?" asked the lawyer.

"Well, hardly so; a slight stain might easily be so caused; but hardly a round spot like that. That spot must have been caused by a small drop falling on that place—not by the muslin having been brought into contact with any portion of blood, however small. How could that one little round drop of blood have come there?" said the anatomist, thoughtfully. "It is singular enough."

Then, when the dress had been removed preparatory to the examination of the body, the Professor

himself and his assistants minutely searched every part of it—in vain. There was no other, even the smallest, mark of blood to be found.

“Are you sure that that spot *is* blood?” asked the lawyer.

“Are you sure whether a deed *is* signed or *is not* signed when you see it?” retorted the anatomist. “Yes; that spot has been caused by a drop of blood falling there—a very minute drop. Of that there can be no doubt. And now we must proceed to examine the body externally. If there should be nothing to be learned from that, we must see what revelations the knife may bring to light.”

And then the Professor, aided by his pupils, proceeded to institute a minute and careful examination of the body.

At the first sight it appeared to be as unblemished in every part of it as Nature’s choicest and most perfect handiwork could be. So little did a mere cursory view suggest the possibility that life would have been destroyed by any external violence, that the Professor was about to take the necessary steps for ascertaining what light could be thrown on the manner of her death by the internal condition of the different portions of the organism, when the sharper eyes of one of the young assistants were drawn to a very slight indication, which he immediately pointed out to his superior.

The appearance in question consisted of a very small round white spot, around which there was a slight equally circular redness. It was situated nearly in the middle of the body, just below the meeting of the ribs on the chest, about a broad hand’s breadth

---

above the waistband—in such a position, in short, as to be very nearly at the point where the neck-opening of the dress ceased.

No second glance was needed, as soon as the Professor's attention had been called to this appearance, to ensure the riveting of his attention on it. Nor was much examination necessary to convince him that he had now, in truth, discovered the cause and the means of death.

The slight mark in question was, in fact, the trace of a wound inflicted by a very fine needle, which had pierced the heart, and, having caused immediate death, had been left in the wound, ingeniously hidden by means which it needed a second look to discover.

The effect of this discovery on the Professor was singular. He seemed taken aback by it, and, one would have said, alarmed at it, in a manner which it seemed difficult for Signor Fortini to account for.

"What is it astonishes you so, Signor Professore," said he; "surely you were prepared to find that a murder had been done? I never had any doubt of it; and why not in that way as well as another? And a very ingenious mode of inflicting death in a quiet way it seems to be."

"Yes, indeed. The fact is that I was struck by——"

The Professor broke off speaking suddenly with a start; and darted a quick alarmed glance at the face of Signor Fortini, who did not fail to remark it, and to be much puzzled by the Professor's manner.

The latter, while he had been speaking, had stooped to examine the minute trace of the wound closely, and had put his finger on the spot; and it

was on doing so that he had interrupted himself, and shown renewed symptoms of surprise and dismay. What this closer examination had shown him was the fact that an infinitesimally small portion of white wax had been very neatly and carefully introduced into the orifice of the wound, in such a manner as to prevent all effusion of blood, and almost to escape the observation of the naked eye.

"Why, one would say you were a novice at this sort of thing, Tomosarchi, you seem so much affected by it," said the lawyer; "what is it that moves you so? Why, you are as pale, man, as if you were bringing to light a crime of your own instead of somebody else's."

"Ah! not that exactly. No, but it is a very singular thing. One would say that this death must have been caused by some one who had some little knowledge of anatomy, or, at least, had been put up to the trick by some one else who possessed such knowledge," said the Professor, recovering himself with an effort.

"And that is what our friend the Marchesino Ludovico is most assuredly innocent of. I take note of your remark, Signor Professore," said the lawyer.

"But one would think, that all the other persons on whom it is possible that suspicion might rest, must be equally void of any such knowledge," returned Tomosarchi.

"How do we know that? How can I tell what strange odds and ends of knowledge this Venetian artist may have picked up. Artists,—they have constantly more or less acquaintance with medical students, and such like. Some knowledge of anatomy is need-

---



ful to them in their business. For my part, it seems to me very likely that this girl might have such knowledge as would teach her so easy a way of getting rid of her rival. Then you will observe that very little physical strength was needed for the infliction of such a wound. It might have been done perfectly easily by the hand of a young girl. I declare it seems to me that the result of your examinations tends to make it more probable than ever that the Venetian is the criminal."

"Well, it may be so. Certain it is, that no degree of strength beyond what she, or any other such person could have exerted, was needed for giving that death to a sleepy person. But it is equally clear that a certain amount of special knowledge was required for the purpose," rejoined the anatomist. "And now," added he; "I must draw up my report. *A rivederci, Signor Fortini! A rivederci, Signori!*"

"One word more, Signor Professore, before I leave you," said the lawyer; "is the special knowledge you speak of, such as—any member of your profession we will say—would be possessed of."

"Well, I should not say that it was likely such a method of concealing a crime would have suggested itself to such an one, more than to another. It is the clever invention of one who meditated murder. But, I may say at once to you, what I shall have to say in due season to the magistrates, that the trick is not a new one. I have heard of such a thing before now."

"But not as a common thing," pursued the lawyer.

"Quite the reverse—as a very strange and peculiar thing," replied the Professor.

"And when did you hear of a case of murder com-

mitted in this strange and peculiar manner?" persisted the lawyer.

The Professor shot a sharp quick glance at the lawyer's face; and his own flushed red as he replied, "Ay—if I could remember that—but it is a reported case; anybody may have read it. A murder was committed by similar means in the Island of Sardinia, not very long ago!"

"Not very long ago," reiterated the lawyer, musingly.

"No, not very long ago; but the case has been reported, I tell you. Anybody may have read it."

"Humph," said the lawyer, as he turned to go, with his mind evidently busily at work both on the strange sort of confusion that had been visible in the Professor's manner, and on the circumstances he had elicited from him.

"I'll tell you what," said one of the young students to the other, while they were engaged in preparing to consign the body of the murdered woman to the police. "I'll tell you what: I'll be blessed if I don't think the governor knows, or has a shrewd guess, who it is has done this job. Did you mark the way he looked, and went as pale as death, when I showed him the place?"

"Bah, nonsense! He was vexed that he had not seen it himself. How should he know anything about it?"

"I don't know how; but I know him, and his ways," said the first speaker.

"But if he thinks he has any guess at the murderer, why don't he say it at once?" asked the younger lad.

"Ah, yes, I think so; I should like to see him at

it. That's not his business, that's the lawyer's business. You may depend on his keeping his own secret, if he has got one. The governor likes quiet sailing in still water, he does. But if he did not see something more in this little bit of steel and atom of wax, that have stopped a life so cleverly, than the mere things themselves and the effect of them,—why, then, I know nothing about old Buonaventura Tomosarchi, that's all."

"How see something more?" said the younger lad, open-eyed.

"Saw who put 'em there, Ninny. It is not everybody who could be up to such a dodge; and I feel sure the governor could make a shrewd guess who did that clever trick.

## CHAPTER X.

### Public Opinion.

THE post-mortem examination had taken place at an early hour, before the members of the idler portion of the society of the city had come forth from their homes. An Italian idler—one of the class who, in common Italian phrase, are able to "*fare vita beata*," to lead a happy life, *i. e.* to do nothing whatever from morning till night—an Italian of that favoured class never passes his hours in his own house, or dwelling, of whatever kind it may be. As soon as he is up and dressed he goes out into the city to enjoy the air and sunshine if it be fine weather, to saunter in cafés or at the Circolo, if it rain.

Professor Tomosarchi and lawyer Fortini had been

earlier afoot, and the scene described in the last chapter had passed, and the general results of the examination were beginning to be known in the city, when the *jeunesse dorée* of Ravenna began to assemble at the Circolo. It was known also by that time that the young Venetian artist, with whom Ludovico was well known to be on intimate terms of some kind or other, had been arrested at her lodging at an early hour that morning, on suspicion of having been concerned in the murder of La Bianca.

Of course that terrible event continued more than ever to occupy the attention of all Ravenna, almost to the exclusion of every other topic of conversation. It was very easy to understand the nature of the motive, which might be supposed to have led Paolina to do the deed. And when it became known further, that the means by which the death of the victim had been brought about were such as might easily have been accomplished by the weakest woman's hand; and that it had been discovered that Paolina had been in the Pineta—for such was the not quite accurate form which the report assumed—just about the time when the crime must have been committed, the general opinion inclined very much to the notion that she, the stranger from Venice, was, indeed, the assassin.

Precedents were hunted up, and many a story told of women who had done equally desperate deeds under similar provocation.

"I feel very little doubt of it, myself," said Manutoli; "there is nothing improbable in such a solution, while it is in the highest degree improbable that Ludovico should have raised his hand against a

sleeping woman, enticed by him in the forest for the purpose. Bah! It is monstrous."

"He would have been more to be pitied than blamed if he had done it," said another of the young men, who did not bear himself a reputation of the most brilliant sort; "if I had a rich uncle I swear by all the saints, that I would not let the prettiest woman, that ever made a fool of a man, come between me and my inheritance."

"Ludovico was not the man to have done it any way. Besides, the mischief had not been done; it was only a project talked of. There might have been a hundred ways of breaking off so absurd a match. It would have been time to have recourse to *les grands moyens*, when the thing had been done, and all else had failed. To my notion jealousy has done it."

"So say I. Two to one I bet that it turns out that the Venetian girl has done the trick."

"But have you heard, all of you, that there is a third horse in the field?" said the Marchese Faraoni, whose *palazzo* was close to the house in which the Conte Leandro lived; "there is another candidate for the galleys. Has nobody heard that our poet was arrested before he was out of bed this morning?"

"What! Leandro?"

"The Conte Lombardoni?"

"No!"

"You don't mean that?"

"What, arrested for this murder of La Bianca?"

"Impossible!"

"But quite true, nevertheless. Anybody can easily assure themselves of the fact by walking as far as the Palazzo del Governo."

"Leandro arrested on suspicion of murder? Well, I think the tragedy is passing into a farce."

"It will be fatal to Leandro. He will die of fright, if no other evil happens to him."

"Think of the cantos of verse he will make on it."

"He will die singing, like a swan."

"But do you know anything about it, Faraoni? Have you any idea how he has come to be implicated in the matter?"

"I learnt at his own lodging that he did not come home to bed the night of the ball, but was absent from home at the time the murder must have been committed. And then I was told that the men at the Porta Nuova had declared that they had seen him pass out of the city going in the direction of the Pineta at a very early hour that morning."

"*Per Bacco!* it is very strange. What, in the name of all the saints, could he be doing out there at that time, when all honest folks were in their beds?"

"Remember all the snubbing he has had from the poor Diva all through carnival. By Jove! it looks very queer."

"Do you remember how he turned all sorts of colours here last night, when we were talking of it?"

"And how anxious he seemed to say everything that appeared to make it bear hard upon Ludovico?"

"Yes, and contradicted himself. First, he knew about it, and then he knew nothing."

"*Per Dio!* I don't know what to think of it."

"So, then, there are now three persons suspected—Ludovico, and the Venetian girl, and the Conte Leandro?"

"And all three were not far from the spot where the deed was done, and all three had motives, more or less credible, for doing it."

"Ludovico, because his uncle was going to marry the woman, which would have cut him out of his inheritance; the Venetian girl, because she loved Ludovico, and saw him making love to the poor Diva; and Leandro, because she snubbed him, and laughed at him, and would have nothing to say to either him or his verses."

"And the one certain thing is, that the unlucky Diva lies dead, and was murdered by somebody. Upon my life, it is the queerest thing I ever heard of."

"What do you think of it, Manutoli?" said one of the speakers in the foregoing dialogue to the Baron, who was an older man than most of the others there.

"My notion is that the girl is the guilty party," said Manutoli. "As for Leandro, it seems too absurd. I don't think he has courage enough to kill a cat. Besides, I daresay he hated La Bianca quite enough to slander her, and backbite, and that sort of thing; but murder——"

"She made fun of him. Leandro don't like to be laughed at,—specially by the women, and, more specially still, when other fellows are by to hear it; and then those poets are always such desperate fellows. I should not wonder——" said one of the younger men.

In the meantime, while talk of this sort was going on at the Circolo, Signor Fortini was on his way out to St. Apollinare in Classe, according to the intention he had expressed on the preceding evening; but he was not making the expedition alone. Signor Pietro

Logarini, the Papal Commissioner of Police, was bound on the same errand. The old lawyer, as he passed under the gateway of the Porta Nuova in his comfortable calèche, overtook Signor Logarini, who was about to proceed to St. Apollinare on foot, and who had paused at the gate for the purpose of making some inquiries of the officials there.

"Good morning, Signor Pietro. I suppose we are bound for the same place; will you permit me to offer you a seat in my carriage?" said the lawyer.

"Thanks, Signor Giovacchino, I shall be glad of the lift. Yes, I suppose we are about the same business, and a bad one it is. I was making a few inquiries at the gate; but I don't see that there is much to be gleaned there," said the Commissary, as he got into the lawyer's carriage.

"Well, it seems to me that we have reaped a pretty good harvest there already," returned the lawyer.

"Enough to make the matter one of the most puzzling I ever had to do with," returned the Commissary. "You have heard, I suppose, that we have arrested the girl Paolina Foscarelli, and the Conte Leandro Lombardoni?"

"No; but it was a matter of course that you would do so—specially the girl," said the lawyer.

"We could not avoid arresting the Conte also; it is so unaccountable that he should have been going out of the city, and so near the place of the crime."

"What account does he give of the matter himself?" asked the lawyer.

"No very clear one; and he seems to be frightened out of his senses; but that proves nothing. One man takes a thing coolly, another is so flushed that you



would think he was guilty only to look at him; but there is little to be judged from such appearances. I don't much think the Conte had anything to do with it, for my part."

"What were you asking about at the gate?"

"Well, I thought I would just ascertain if any other parties had passed the gate that same morning," said the Commissary.

"Others! Have we not enough to make a sufficient puzzle already?" said Fortini.

"Yes, indeed; but information is always useful. The men say that they are quite sure that no other person of any kind whatever passed the gate either outwards or inwards, during the night till the Conte Leandro passed in the morning; and then the girl not long afterwards; and then the Marchesino with the *prima donna*."

The lawyer remained plunged in thought for some minutes, as the carriage rolled over the flat dismal-looking road towards the old church; and then he said, shaking his head, and pouting out his lips,—

"I think we shall find, Signor Pietro, that that girl has done it. There's nothing a jealous woman will not do. We shall find, I think, that to have been the case; that is, if we succeed in finding out anything at all. Perhaps the most likely thing is that we may never know what hand did the deed."

"Oh, come, I hope better things than that. That would not suit our book at all. We must find it out, if we can; and it is early days yet to talk of being beat. We are not half at the end of our means of investigation yet, Signor Giovacchino," said the Commissary.

"It may be that something may be to be picked up at the church here."

"And then I must go on to the farm-house, where the Marchesino and the *prima donna* left their carriage."

"We'll have a talk with the friars first."

As Fortini spoke the carriage drew up at the west front of the desolate old basilica. It was a fine spring morning, and by the time the lawyer and the Commissary reached the church, the sun had dissipated the mist, and it was warm and pleasant.

The great doors of the church stood yawningly open as usual, and the gate of iron rail was ajar. And at the south-western corner of the building, just where the sun-ray from the south-west made a sharp line against the black shadow cast by the western front of the building, an old Franciscan was sitting; not Father Fabiano, but his sole companion, Friar Simone, the lay-brother.

Neither Signor Fortini nor the police Commissary had ever seen the old guardian of the Basilica; but they were sufficiently instructed in the details of Franciscan costume to perceive at once that the figure before them was not a priest, but only a lay-brother.

"Is there any place, *frate*, where I can put my horse and carriage under shelter for half an hour or so?" said the lawyer, as the old friar, having risen from his seat in the sunshine, came forward towards the carriage.

"There is place enough and to spare, Signori," said the old man, pointing with a languid and weary-like gesture to the huge pile of half-dilapidated conventual buildings on the southern side of the church;

"you can put horse and carriage as they stand into the old barn there, without undoing a buckle. I will open the door for your lordships, if it will hang together so that it can be opened."

The lawyer and the Commissary dismounted from the carriage, and the former proceeded to lead his horse into the huge barn of the convent; while the latter employed himself in observing every detail of the surrounding localities with those rapid all-seeing and all-remembering glances that the habits and education of his profession had rendered a part of his nature, preparatory to the investigations they had both come to make.

## CHAPTER XI.

In Father Fabiano's Cell.

"YOU can enter the Basilica at your pleasure, Signori; the gate is unlocked," said the lay-brother, indicating the entrance to the church with a half-formed gesture of his hand, which fell to his side again when he had half raised it, as if the effort of extending his arm horizontally had been too much for him. It was a matter of course to him that any human beings who came to St. Apollinare could have no business there but to see the old walls, which he, the friar, would have given so much never to see again.

"We will do so presently," said Signor Logarini, in reply; "but, in the first place, we wish to speak with Father Fabiano—he is the *custode* of the church, is he not?"

"Father Fabiano is ill a-bed, Signor; I am only

out of my bed since yesterday, and it is as much as I can do to crawl. There's not many days in the year, I think, that we are both well; and if we should be both down together, God help us. It is not just the healthiest place in the world, this."

"What is the matter with the *padre*? Has he been ill long?" asked the lawyer, with a glance at the Commissary.

"Since yesterday afternoon. Why, I tell you I was in bed yesterday; he down, I must turn out. Ah—h—h! it 'll all be over one of these days."

"But what ails the *custode*?" asked Signor Logarini again.

"Fever and ague, I suppose; that is what is always killing both of us more or less. Pity it is so slow about it!" muttered the lay-brother, returning to his seat in the sunshine.

"But I suppose that Father Fabiano is not so ill but that we can speak with him? It is important that we should do so," said the Commissary, eyeing the friar with a suspicious glance.

"There is nothing to prevent you or anybody else going to him that choose to do so—nothing to prevent any one of those cattle doing so, for that matter. There is neither bolt nor latch; you can go into his chamber, if you are so minded," returned the lay-brother, rather surlily.

"Will you go and tell him that—Signor Fortini from Ravenna wishes to speak with him, and would be obliged by his permission to come into his room for a few minutes. We don't wish to disturb him more than is necessary."

"I'll tell him—though you might as well go to

cell opposite to the doorway, on which some garments were hanging; and on the wall facing the bed there was a large, rudely carved, and yet more rudely painted crucifix. By the side of the bed nearest the door there hung, on a nail driven into the wall, a copper receptacle for holy water, the upper part of which was ornamented with a figure of St. Francis in the act of receiving the "Stigmata," in *repoussé* work, by no means badly executed. And pasted on the bare wall, immediately above the pillow of the little bed, was a coloured print of the cheapest and vilest description, representing the Madonna with the seven legendary poignards sticking in her bosom, and St. Francis, supported on either side by a friar of his order, kneeling at her feet.

These objects formed absolutely the entire furniture of the cell. There was nothing else whatsoever in the room; neither the smallest fragment of a looking-glass, nor any means or preparation for ablution whatsoever.

The old monk lay on his back in the bed, with his head propped rather highly on a hard straw bolster; and the extreme attenuation of his body was indicated by the very slight degree in which the clothes that covered him were raised above the level of the bedstead. On the coverlet upon his chest, there was a rosary of large beads turned out of box-wood. The parts of each bead nearest to the string and in contact with each other were black with the undisturbed dirt and dust of many years. But the protuberant circumference of each wooden ball was polished to a rich shining orange-colour by the constant handling of the fingers.

It seemed both to Signor Fortini and to the Commissary, that there could be no doubt about it, that the old man was really ill. He was lying in his frock of thick brown woollen, and the cowl of it was drawn over his head. He seemed to be suffering from cold, and his teeth were audibly chattering in his head; and his thin, thin claw-like hands shook as they clutched his crucifix. His face was lividly pale, and his eyes gleamed out from under the cowl with a restless feverish brightness.

That he was ill could hardly be doubted. And it seemed to the lawyer and the Commissary as well as to the old lay-brother, natural enough to suppose that a man who fell ill at St. Apollinare was ill with fever and ague. But whether that were really the nature of his malady, his visitors had not sufficient medical knowledge to judge; but it was probable enough that the aged monk had had quite sufficient experience of fever and ague, to know pretty well himself, whether he were suffering from that cause or not.

"We are sorry to find you ill, father," said Fortini; "and though we have come from Ravenna on purpose to speak with you, we would not have disturbed you if our business had not been important. Are you suffering much now?"

"Not much more than usual," said the sick man, shutting his eyes, while his pallid lips continued to move, as he muttered to himself an "Ave Maria."

"And can you give us your attention for a few minutes?" rejoined the lawyer.

"I will answer to your asking as far as I can; but—my head is confused, and I don't remember much clearly about anything. It seems to me as if I had

been lying on this bed for months and months," replied the old friar.

"And yet, you know, you were up and well yesterday morning, when you were with the young girl who came to copy the mosaics, you know, on the scaffolding in the church?" said the lawyer.

"Yes; I was with the girl—Paolina Foscarelli, a Venetian—on the scaffolding. Was it yesterday?"

"Yesterday it was that she was here. Yesterday morning. And it is hardly necessary to ask you if you know what happened here in the Pineta much about that time, or shortly afterwards. You have heard of the murder, of course?"

So violent a trembling seized on the aged man as the lawyer spoke thus, that he was unable to answer a word. His old hands shook so that he could hardly hold the beads in his fingers, while his chattering teeth and trembling lips tried to formulate the words of a prayer.

"Did you, or did you not hear that a dreadful murder was committed yesterday morning in the Pineta not far from this place?" said the Commissary, speaking for the first time, and in a less kindly manner than the old lawyer had used.

A redoubled access of teeth-chattering and shivering was for some time the only result elicited by this question. The old friar shook in every limb; and the beads of the rosary rattled in his trembling fingers, as he attempted to pass them on their string in mechanically habitual accompaniment to the invocations his lips essayed to mutter.

"It is a terrible thing to speak of truly, father; and we are sorry to be obliged to distress you by

forcing such a subject on your thoughts; but it is our duty to make these inquiries; and you can tell us the few facts—they cannot be many or of much importance—which have come to your knowledge on the subject," said the lawyer, speaking in more gentle accents.

"I heard nothing; but I saw," said the aged man, closing his eyes, as if to shut out the vision which was forced back upon his imagination; and fumbling nervously with his beads, while his pale blue lips trembled with mutterings of mechanically repeated ejaculations.

"Take your time, *padre mio*," said the lawyer gently, making a gesture with his raised hand, at the same time, to repress the less patient eagerness of the Commissary of Police; "we do not want to hurry you. Tell us what it was that you saw."

## CHAPTER XII.

### The Case against Paolina.

THE old friar opened his haggard eyes, which gleamed out with a feverish light from the bottom of their sockets, and from under the shadow of his cowl, and looked piteously up into the lawyer's face. "A little time—a moment to collect my thoughts," he said, passing his parched tongue over the still dryer parchment-like skin of his drawn lips, and painfully swaying his cowed head from one side of the hard pillow to the other, while large drops of perspiration gathered on his brow.



The Commissary shot a meaning glance across the pallet on which the old man lay, to the lawyer, in evident anticipation of the importance of the revelation, heralded by so much of painful emotion.

"By all means, *padre mio*; collect your thoughts. We are sorry for the necessity which obliges us to force your mind back on such painful ones," said the lawyer, laying his hand on that of the friar, which was still fumbling with the shining box-wood beads, scarcely more yellow than the claw-like fingers which held them. "You saw——?"

Still no reply came from the old friar's lips. He writhed his body in the bed, and the manifestation of his agony became more and more intense. The eager impatient air of the Commissary changed itself into one of persistent dogged determination; and he quietly drew from his pocket a note-book and the means of writing in it.

"Now, father, you will be able to tell us what you saw?" said the lawyer in a soothing coaxing voice.

"I saw," said the old friar at length, speaking with his eyes again closed—"I saw the dead body of the woman who had passed the church towards the Pineta in the morning, brought back by six men from the forest. They passed by the western front of the church, and I saw that the body was the body of the woman I speak of."

The Commissary shut up his note-book with a gesture of provoked disappointment, and shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"If that is all you have to tell us, *frate*, you need not have made so much difficulty about it," he said; "we knew all that before, and need not have come

here to be told it. Plenty of people saw the bringing in from the forest of the body of the murdered woman, and would give evidence to the fact without making so much ado about it. Is that all you saw?"

"Did you not see," said the lawyer, again motioning his companion to be patient; "did you not see another young woman in the forest yesterday morning?"

"Not in the forest," replied the friar without any difficulty. "Not in the forest; I saw another young woman here yesterday, but it was in the church. She came here to make copies of some of the mosaics. I had been previously told to expect such an one."

"Did she come to the church before the time when you saw the other lady pass towards the forest?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes; about half an hour or more before," answered the friar.

"And where was she when the second lady passed, going towards the Pineta?" asked the lawyer again.

"She was on the scaffolding in the church, which had been prepared for her to make her copies of the mosaics."

"Do you know whether she saw, or was aware that the second lady had passed the church to go towards the Pineta?"

"I know that she was aware of it; I was with her on the scaffolding. We both together saw the woman who was afterwards brought back dead pass in a *bagarino* with the Marchese Ludovico di Castelmare, towards the Pineta."

The lawyer looked hard at the Commissary; and the latter in obedience, as it seemed, to the look, took

out his note-book again, and made a note of the friar's declaration.

"And what did the young lady who came to copy the mosaics do afterwards? Where did you part with her?" resumed the lawyer.

"She left the church, and walked in the direction of the forest. I parted from her at the door of the church."

"And did you see her any more in the course of that morning?" asked the lawyer again.

"I did not: I saw her no more from that time to this," replied the friar. During the whole of this interrogation, he had appeared far less distressed and disturbed than he had been before speaking of his having seen the body of La Bianca carried past the church towards the city. He had answered all the questions concerning Paolina readily and without hesitation.

"I don't think we need trouble you any further, *frate*," said the Commissary. "I hope that you will soon get over your touch of fever; and then, if we need you, there will be no difficulty in your attending, when wanted, in the city. I don't see, that there is anything more to be got at present," he added, addressing the lawyer.

So the two visitors bade the friar adieu, and went down the stairs on to the open piazza in front of the church.

"Does that fellow know anything more than he tells us?" said the Commissary, as they stepped out of the narrow entry on to the green sward of the piazza.

"I fancy not; I don't see much what he is at all likely to know," replied the lawyer.

"Nor I; but his manner was so remarkable. One would have said that he was conscious of having committed the murder himself. In all my experience I never saw a man so hard put to it to tell a plain and simple fact."

"Well, the poor old fellow is ill, you see. And then, no doubt, the sight of the body brought back out of the forest made a terrible impression on him. The extreme seclusion, tranquillity, and monotony of his life here, the absence from year's end to year's end of any sort of emotion of any kind, would naturally have the result of increasing the painful effect which such an event and such a sight would have upon him. My own notion is that there is nothing further to be got out of him."

"There is our friend the lay-brother sitting in the sunshine just where we left him. We might as well just see what he can tell us before going back to the city."

"He seems very ill, the *padre*," pursued the Commissary, addressing himself to brother Simone, as he and the lawyer lounged up to the spot where he was sitting; "the fever must have laid hold of him very suddenly; for it seems he was well enough yesterday morning."

"That is the way with the *maledetto morbo*," returned the lay-brother; "one hour you are well—as well, that is to say, as one can ever be in such a place as this—and the next you are down on your back shivering and burning like—like the poor souls in purgatory. Doubtless the more of it one has had, the less there is to come. That's the only comfort."

"The *padre's* mind seems to have been very pain-

fully affected by the sight of the body of the woman, who was murdered in the forest, as it was being carried back to the city. Did you see it too?" asked the lawyer, observing the friar narrowly, as he spoke.

"Sì, Signor, I saw it too, and a piteous sight it was. Father Fabiano and I were both out here on the *piazza* when the body was carried past. For I was just coming from the belfry yonder, where I had been to ring Compline; and the *padre* was at the same time coming out of the church, where he had been as usual with him at that hour, at his devotions before the altar of the Saint."

"Then at the hour of Compline the father had not yet been taken ill?" observed the Commissary.

"*Scusi*, Signor; I think he had been struck by the fever at that time. He fell a-shivering and a-shaking so that he could hardly stand, when the body was carried past. But that is the way the mischief always begins. Ah, there's never a doctor knows it better than I do, and no wonder."

"You don't think then," said the lawyer, "that it was the sight of the dead body that moved him so?"

"Why should it?" said the lay-brother, in the true spirit of monastic philosophy; "why should it? all flesh is grass; there is nothing so strange in death. He sighed and groaned a deal, but that is often Father Fabiano's way when he comes out from his exercises in the church. He seemed as if he could hardly stand on his legs: but, bless you, that was the fever. He took to his bed as soon as ever the men carrying the body were out of sight. He's an old man is Father Fabiano."

"Where had he been all the time between the time

when the painter lady left the church, and the hour of Compline?" asked the Commissary, who had been busily thinking during the lay-brother's moralizings.

"Ever since a little after the Angelus he had been on his knees at the altar of St. Apollinare, according to his custom. He told me so, when he came to give me my potion; for I was down with the fever yesterday morning."

"Do you know where he was before the Angelus?" returned the Commissary.

"He had to ring the Angelus himself, seeing that I was down with the fever. And he came back to the convent in a hurry, fearing that he was too late. There's very little doubt that it was heating himself that way that made the fever take hold of him."

"Where was he hurrying back from, then? Where had he been?" asked the Commissary, endeavouring to hide his eagerness for the reply to this question under a semblance of carelessness.

"He told me, when he came to my cell, that he had been into the forest; and it was plain to see that the walk had been too much for him; he's too old for moving much now, is Father Fabiano."

"He had been into the forest; and when he came back at the hour of the Angelus, he seemed quite overcome by his walk?" said the Commissary, recapitulating, and taking out his note-book as he spoke.

"Yes, he did; so much so, that as I lay on my bed and listened to the Angelus bell a-going, I thought to myself that the old man had hardly the strength to pull the rope," said the lay-brother.

"Hardly strength to pull the rope," repeated the

Commissary, as he completed the note he was scribbling in his note-book. "Well, I hope he will soon get over his attack of fever. I think we need not trouble you any further at present, *frate*—what is your name, my friend?"

"Simone, by the mercy of God, lay-brother of the *terz' ordine*——"

"That will do, *frate* Simone," interrupted the Commissary, adding a word to the entry in his note-book. "Now, Signor Giovacchino, if you are ready, I think we may get your carriage out of the barn and go back to Ravenna."

"We have not got much for our pains, I am afraid," said the lawyer to the Commissary of police as they began to leave the Basilica behind them on their way back to the city.

"Humph!" said the Commissary, who was apparently too much absorbed in his own meditations to be in a mood for conversation.

"Signor Giovacchino," he said, suddenly, after they had traversed nearly half their short journey in silence, "my belief is that your young friend the Marchese had no hand in this matter."

"I am convinced he had not," said the lawyer, who was, however, very far from having reached any conviction of the kind; "but what we want is some such probable theory on the subject as shall compete successfully with the theory of his guilt in the matter."

"That theory—shall I give it you? It is not only a theory; it is my firm belief as to the facts of the case."

"You suspect——"

"I more than suspect—I am very strongly per-

sualed that this murder has been committed by the girl Paolina Foscarelli."

"My own notion——"

"Look here, this is how it has been. The Marchese Ludovico has made love to this girl—has made her in love with him—taking the matter *au grand sérieux*, in the way girls will—specially, I am told, it is the way with those Venetian women. Well, by ill chance, as the devil would have it, she sees her lover starting on a *tête-à-tête* expedition into the Pineta with this other girl—just the woman of all others in the world, as I am given to understand, to be a dangerous rival, and to excite a deadly jealousy. This much we have in evidence. Further, we know that the girl Paolina was expected to return from her expedition to St. Apollinare early in the morning—say at nine o'clock, or thereabouts—whereas she did not return till several hours afterwards. In addition to all this, we have now ascertained that when she left the church she did not set out on her return towards the city, as she might naturally be expected to have done; but, on the contrary, went in the direction of the Pineta. Then, assuming the story told by the Marchese to be true, we know that, about the very time that this Paolina was entering the forest, her rival was lying asleep and alone there in the immediate neighbourhood. We know that the means adopted for the perpetration of the crime were such as to be quite within a woman's physical power, and that the weapon used for the purpose such as a woman may much more readily be supposed to have about her than a man; what do you say to that as a theory of the facts? Is not the evidence overpoweringly strong against this Venetian?"



"Of course my own attention had been called to the case of suspicion against her. But I confess I had not been struck by the last circumstance you mention; and it seems to me a very strong one. How can it be supposed that a man—a man like the Marchese Ludovico—should chance to have a needle about him? The case of suspicion against him, mark, altogether excludes the notion that he went out *prepared* to take the life of this unfortunate woman. It is suggested that he put her to death in order to escape from the ruin that would have ensued from his uncle's marriage with her. No other possible motive for such a deed can be conceived. But he knew nothing of any such purpose on the part of the Marchese till the girl herself told him of it as they were driving together to the forest. Therefore, he had not come out prepared with a needle for the purpose of committing murder. Neither, it is true, does the theory we are considering suppose that Paolina came out prepared to do such a deed. But the weapon used is a needle. Is it more likely that a man or that a woman should have by chance such an article about them? I confess it seems to me that this circumstance alone is sufficient to turn the scale of the probabilities unmistakably."

"But that is not all," said the Commissary, laying his finger impressively on the lawyer's sleeve; "my belief is that that old friar, *padre* Fabiano, is aware of the fact that the murder was committed by Paolina Foscarelli. I am not disposed to think that he had any hand in the doing of the deed; but I think that he has a knowledge of her guilt. He is ill now, doubtless; but I do not believe that he is suffering from fever and ague. He is suffering from the emotions of

horror and terror. We know that he was in the Pineta much about the time at which the murder must have been committed, and very near the spot where it must have been committed. And he comes back in a state of terrible emotion and consternation. His manner in speaking to us to-day you must have observed. I have no belief in an old friar being so terribly impressed by the mere sight of a dead body."

"That is all true," said the lawyer, nodding his head up and down several times; "and the circumstances do seem to point to the probability of your conclusion; but——"

"But why, you will say, should the old man, if he has a merely innocent knowledge of that which I suspect him to know, refuse to tell the whole truth simply as he knows it? I will tell you why not. In the first place, if you had had as much experience of monks, and friars, and nuns, as I have, you would know that it is next to impossible to induce them ever to give information to justice of any facts which it is possible for them to conceal. It seems to them, I fancy, like recognizing a lay authority in a manner they don't like. They will communicate nothing to you if they can help it."

"Yes, that's true. I know that is the nature of them," assented the lawyer.

"Then, observe, this Father Fabiano is a Venetian, a fellow-citizen of the girl. You know how the Venetians hold together. You may feel quite sure that if he did know her to be guilty of a crime, he would screen her to the utmost of his power. Of course I have not done with him yet. *Tutt' altro*. We must have an account of that morning stroll in the Pineta

from the old gentleman's own lips. Meantime, I do not think that we need consider our trip to-day to have been altogether thrown away."

"Very far from it. Very far from it, indeed. Honestly, I think that you have hit the nail on the head, Signor Pietro. There is nothing like the practical experience of you gentlemen of the police, who pass your lives in playing at who-is-the-sharpest with the most astute of human beings."

"And beating them at their own game," said the Commissary, self-complacently. "If that murder was not committed by Paolina Foscarelli, I will give you or anybody else leave to call me a blockhead."

And therewith Signor Fortini and his companion drove under the old archway of the Porta Nuova and entered the city.

---

## BOOK VI.

PENA PEDE CLAUDO.

## CHAPTER I.

Signor Fortini receives the Signora Steno in his Studio.

It was the end of the first week in Lent; and all Ravenna was still busily engaged in talking, thinking, and speculating on the mysterious crime that had been committed on Ash Wednesday morning in the Pineta.

The excitement on the subject, indeed, was greater now than it had been immediately after the event. For, by this time, everybody in Ravenna knew all that anybody knew on the subject; the manner, time, and place of the murder, and the different competing theories which had been started to account for it, and with the conflicting probabilities of which the judicial authorities were known to be occupying themselves.

These, as the reader knows, were three; based, in each case, on the fact that the suspected person was known, or was supposed to be known, to have been at, or near, to the spot *where* the crime was committed at the time *when* it had been committed.

The Marchese Ludovico was indisputably known, on his own confession, to have been in the immediate neighbourhood of the spot at the time when the murder must have been done.

Paolina Foscarelli was equally indubitably, and by her own confession, not far off from the neighbourhood of the spot at the same time.

Of the Conte Leandro Lombardoni it was known only that he had passed out of the city gate leading in the same direction, at a time which might have enabled him to be present where the deed was done, at the hour when it must have been done. The evidence as to propinquity to the place was less strong in his case than in that of either of the others; but it was supplemented by the unaccountable strangeness of his passing out of the Porta Nuova towards the Pineta at such an hour, and on that particular morning.

The Marchese Ludovico stated that he went thither for the purpose of showing the Pineta to the *prima donna*, who had never seen it. And there was nothing incredible or greatly improbable in the statement.

Paolina declared that she had gone to St. Apollinare in pursuit of her professional business. And the declaration was not only very probable in itself, but could be shown by evidence to be true. Only, while it accounted for her presence in the church of St. Apollinare, it left her departure from the church with her face turned, not towards the city, but towards the Pineta, unaccounted for.

In the case of the Conte Leandro, it was difficult to imagine the motive that could have induced him to leave the city at that hour, in the manner in which he was proved, by the testimony of the men at the gate, to have done. And he gave no assistance himself towards arriving at any satisfactory explanation of so strange a circumstance. He was unable, or unwilling

to account in any way for his conduct on that Ash Wednesday morning.

"He had thought it pleasanter to take a walk that fine morning, than to go to bed after the ball."

Nothing could be more unlike the usual known habits and tastes of the Conte Leandro, than such a freak. But supposing such a whim to have occurred to him, would he have set out on his walk evidently intending to be disguised—with a cloak wrapped round the fantastic costume in which he had been at the ball? Was such a supposition in any wise credible, or admissible?

In each of the three cases there seemed also to be a motive for the deed that might be deemed sufficient to have led to it; and from which neither of the parties suspected could show that they were free.

In the case of the Marchese Ludovico, it was the terrible temptation of delivering his family name from ridicule and disgrace, and himself from the prospect of absolute beggary.

In the case of Paolina, it was the madness of woman's jealousy, wrought to a pitch of desperation by circumstances similar to such as had ere now produced many a similar tragedy.

In the case of the Conte Leandro, it was the cruel mortification of a man whose monstrous vanity was notorious to the whole city.

These were the three hypotheses between which the possibilities of the case seemed to lie to those whose position or means of information gave them any real knowledge of the facts. But there was a section of the outside public which had set up for itself and preferred yet a fourth theory—namely, that the *prima*

*donna* had committed suicide. The holders of this opinion were mainly women; and at the head of them was the Signora Orsola Steno. In an agony of grief, indignation, and despair at the accusation brought against her adopted child, and the arrest by which it had been followed up, she loudly maintained her own conviction that the evil and wicked woman had brought her career to a fitting close by putting herself to death.

"Likely enough she may have endeavoured to entrap the Marchese Lamberto; but not very likely," old Orsola thought, "that that exemplary nobleman should have been caught by her wiles. Likely enough she may have plotted to play her last card, by giving the Marchese Ludovico to understand, that the only way to avoid the ruin which would fall upon him by her becoming his uncle's wife, was to take her *himself*. How any such overtures would be received by the noble Marchese Ludovico, all Ravenna ought to know; and at all events she, Orsola Steno, knew surely enough. And upon that rebuff, and utter failure of her last hope, despair had come upon the wretched creature, as well it might, and she had put an end to herself."

To her, Orsola Steno, the case was clear: and she only wondered that anybody could be so blind as not to see it.

But what if such a supposition were simply inconsistent with the known facts? What if it were simply impossible that any person should inflict on themselves such an injury as that which it was evident the murdered woman had sustained; and more impossible still, that they should have been able to adopt the means for concealing the wound which the assassin had adopted? What if such was the perfectly unhesitating

judgment and declaration of the medical authorities?

Such people as Orsola Steno, and those who shared her opinion, are ordinarily impervious to any such reasoning. It is remarkable that, in any case of doubt or circumstances of suspicion, the popular mind—or, at all events, the Italian popular mind—is specially disposed to mistrust the medical profession. They suspect error exactly where scientific certainty is the most perfect, and deception precisely in those who have the least possible imaginable motive for deceiving. Probably it may be because the grounds and means of the knowledge they mistrust are more wholly, than in any other case, beyond the sphere of their own conceptions.

When old Orsola Steno was told that the doctors declared that it was not within the bounds of possibility that La Bianca should have put herself to death in the manner in which she had been put to death, nothing could exceed the profundity of the contempt with which she sneered in reply:

“Ah! they’ll say anything to make out that they know more than other folks, and, maybe, they often know a deal less. Don’t tell *me*. How should *they* know what a woman will do when she is driven? I know what women are, and I know what them doctors are; and you may believe that an old woman, who has been a young one, knows more what such an one as that Bianca can do, when she has no hope before her, than all the doctors.”

“But it is impossible—physically impossible that she could have done it.”

“Ta, ta, ta, ta! Physic, indeed; what’s physic got to do with it? I should like to physic them that try



to throw suspicion on a poor innocent girl all to make out their own cleverness."

So Signora Orsola victoriously, and to the great increase of her confidence in her own powers of insight, continued to hold her own opinion, and it was shared by many other similarly-constituted minds.

The old Venetian woman had lived a very quiet life in the strange city to which fate had brought her, making but few acquaintances, and holding but little intercourse with those few; but now, under the terrible misfortune which had happened, she was stirred up to activity in every way in which activity was possible to her. She went to the Palazzo Castelmare and endeavoured to see the Marchese Lamberto in vain. She was told that the Marchese was ill, and could not see any one.

She went to the Contessa Violante, of whose acquaintanceship with Paolina she was aware, though she had never before seen her, and, oddly enough, the Contessa Violante was disposed to share, or to become a convert to, her own opinion respecting the mode of Bianca's death. The young Contessa was, doubtless, as ignorant of all such matters as old Orsola could be. Her education had been entirely conventual, and those who dwell in the inner sanctums and fortresses of the Church have a curiously instinctive aversion to the certainties and investigations of medical—especially of surgical—science; and the Contessa Violante was, perhaps, hence prepared to vilipend and set at naught the dicta of the scientific authorities.

It was likely that her mind was also warped by her conceptions of what were probable, likely to be providential, and even suitable, in the case of such a per-

son as the deceased singer. Of course, the whole life of such an one was, to the Contessa Violante, a thing abominable and accursed in the eyes of Heaven. It was more strange that all others, who led similar lives, and were engaged in such a profession, should not make an evil end of themselves than that one such should do so.

The Contessa Violante, therefore, was disposed to share the conviction of her visitor, as she most sincerely and cordially sympathised with her in her affliction. To her, also, it was wholly impossible to believe that Paolina had done this thing; nor was it credible to her that Ludovico should be guilty of such a deed. Of the three persons accused she would have found it more possible to believe in the guilt of the Conte Leandro; but, on the whole, she preferred to avoid the necessity of assuming that either of the accused were guilty by admitting the hypothesis of Signora Orsola.

"And if you will take my advice, Signora, I think that the best thing you could do would be to go to Signor Fortini, the lawyer, who is interested in the matter on account of being the lawyer of the Castelmare family. I have always heard him spoken of as an upright and respectable man. I have heard my uncle speak well of him. If I were you I would go and talk to him; you will very easily find out where his *studio* is. Go and tell him who you are, and what your interest in the matter is, and I have no doubt but that he will receive you kindly and listen to what you have to say."

And Signora Orsola took the Contessa Violante's advice, and went directly to the lawyer's *studio* in the little cloister under the walls of the cathedral, on leav-

ing her adviser. As Violante had said, she had no difficulty whatever in finding it.

The lawyer was at home, and Signora Orsola was at once ushered into the inner *studio*, which has been described in a former chapter.

Signor Fortini was, to all appearances, entirely unoccupied; but it is probable that his mind was fully employed in striving to see his way through some portion of the difficulties that hedged about on all sides the subject on which, more or less, all Ravenna was intent. He was sitting before his table, thickly covered with papers, but had thrown himself back in his leather-covered arm-chair, and was grasping his stubbly chin with one hand, the elbow belonging to which rested on the arm of his chair, while the dark eyes, shining out beneath his contracted forehead, were fixed on the ceiling of the little room.

"Signora Orsola Steno," he said, as he half rose, and courteously offered his visitor a seat by the side of the table, so placed as to be fronting his own, while the sitter in it was exactly in a line between him and the window.

"*Sua Signoria mi conosce.* Your lordship knows me, then," said the old woman, whose surprise at finding herself thus recognized sufficed to put altogether out of her head all the carefully arranged opening of her interview with the lawyer which she had taken much pains to prepare.

Signor Fortini had, in truth, never seen the old woman, and had scarcely ever heard of her before the terrible event, which was now bringing her into his presence. But her name, the nature of her connection with Paolina, and very many other particulars concern-

ing her had become known to the lawyer in the course of the investigations which that event had imposed upon him.

"Sufficiently, Signora, though I never had the pleasure of speaking to you before, to be aware of the nature of the business which has induced you to favour me with this visit," replied the lawyer, with grave courtesy.

"Well, then, Signor Dottore, I hope you will excuse——"

"There is not the smallest need for any apology, Signora. *Anzi*—I am very glad that you should have thought it well to call on me; I shall be most happy to hear anything that you may wish to say to me."

"You are very polite, Signor Dottore, I am sure," said the old woman, hesitatingly; for she was alarmed at the idea, which the lawyer's courtesy had suggested to her cautious mind, that she might be supposed to be engaging his professional services, and might thus find herself, before she was aware of it, involved in expenses which she had no means of meeting, and no intention of incurring; "you are extremely polite, but—you see, Signor, it is best to speak plainly—I am a very poor woman; and I have not the means—and I am sure—perhaps I ought not to have troubled *sua Signoria*; but it was the Contessa Violante who advised me to come to you."

"Indeed; I am beholden to the Signora Contessa Violante. As you say most judiciously, Signora, it is best to speak quite plainly. With regard to any professional services, which it might be otherwise in my power to render you, it is necessary to say at once that I am engaged in this most unhappy business on the behalf of my old client and friend the Marchese

Ludovico di Castelmare. There can be no question, therefore, of any professional remuneration to me in the matter from any other quarter. Anything that may pass between us," he continued, perceiving that his visitor had not fully comprehended what he sought to convey to her, "must be of the nature of private conversation, and will not entail on you," he added, yet more plainly with a good-humoured smile, and putting his hand on her sleeve as he spoke, "any possible expense whatever."

"Thank you kindly, sir; and, truth to say, it is not so much that I wanted to ask you to say or to do anything, as only just not to say what a many people in this city are wicked enough to say and to think," said old Orsola, much re-assured, and persuaded that she was approaching the business in hand in the most cautious and clever manner imaginable.

"I hope, Signora, that I shall not say anything which it is wicked to say; but what is it that people are wicked enough to say?" rejoined the lawyer, who knew now perfectly well what the wicked saying was.

"Why they say, Signor Dottore—some of them—some of them are wicked enough to say that that dear blessed child has—it is enough to blister one's tongue to say it—has done that dreadful thing; *Santa Maria abbia misericordia*—that murder in the forest. *O Dio mio!* Why——"

"Is she any relative of yours, Signora, the Signorina Paolina Foscarelli?" asked the lawyer, quietly.

"No relative by blood, Signor; but she is the same to me as a daughter. I took her when she was left an orphan——"

"And she has lived with you ever since?"

"Ever since she has lived with me as if she was my own, Signor; and if anybody in the world ever knew another, I know her; and, bless your heart, she isn't capable of lifting her hand against a fly, let alone a Christian. There never was such wicked nonsense talked in this world since world it was; and I'm told, Signor Dottore, that you have said that she had been the one as did this deed; and——"

"Stop, stop, my good Signora Orsola! Are you aware that you are accusing me of being guilty of punishable defamation and slander? *I* say that the Signorina Paolina Foscarelli committed murder? Who on earth could ever have told you so monstrous an untruth? Allow me to assure you that I never said anything of the kind."

"Oh, Signor Dottore, I *am* so glad to hear you say so. What lies people do tell, to be sure; I am sure it was a very good thought of the Contessa Violante to tell me to come to you; and since you say that the poor child is innocent, as innocent she is, as the child unborn——"

"Stay, Signora, stay; you go too fast—somewhat too fast. Unhappily, I am by no means in a condition to say that your young friend is innocent of this crime; appearances, it must be admitted, are very much against her; we must hope that they can be explained. I accuse no one; it is not my province to do so."

"But you don't think the judges will believe that my child could have done such a thing? If they only knew her! You don't think that, do you, Signor Dottore?" said the poor woman, with a voice and manner of piteous appeal.

"They will judge according to the evidence and

the probabilities of the case. It is impossible to say as yet to what conclusion these may seem to point. The Marchese Ludovico is an acquaintance of yours and of the Signorina Paolina, is he not?"

"An acquaintance? why they are engaged to be married," almost shrieked poor Signora Orsola; "has not your lordship heard that they are engaged to be married?"

"Indeed! and you are acquainted with the Contessa Violante too. Do you know whether her ladyship is aware of the engagement you speak of? I ask, because she is an old friend of the Marchese Ludovico."

"To be sure she is aware of it. She and Paolina have often talked it over together. *Altro che*, aware of it."

"Humph," said the lawyer thoughtfully; and then remained silent for a minute or two, while old Orsola looked at him wistfully.

"It must be very terrible to you then, Signora, to think that the Marchese should be suspected of this shocking crime, since you have such reason to feel an interest in him," said he at last, looking up suddenly at his companion.

"Lord bless your heart," exclaimed the old woman in reply; "the Marchese never did nothing of the sort, no more than my poor innocent lamb did it. Nothing of the kind."

"Perhaps, then, you would not mind saying who did do it," said the lawyer; "since you seem to know all about it."

"Why she did it herself to be sure. It is a wonder anybody should doubt it. And a like enough end for

such a baggage to come to," said Signora Orsola, with much bitterness.

"You do not seem to have been among the admirers of the Signora Bianca," said the lawyer, with a furtively shrewd look at the old woman.

"Admirers, indeed! She had too many admirers, I am thinking. A good-for-nothing, impudent, brazen—well, she has gone to her account, so I won't be the one to speak ill of her."

"You seem to have had considerable opportunities of becoming acquainted with her character, Signora Orsola. Had you much acquaintance with her?"

"I never saw her but once in my life, and that was at the theatre on the last Sunday night of Carnival. The Marchese had given us a box."

"And it was upon that occasion then, that she impressed you so unfavorably. The Signorina Paolina I suppose was with you at the theatre?"

"Of course she was. Would it be likely, I ask you, Signor Dottore, that the Marchese took the box for *me*?"

"And no doubt the Signorina Foscarelli was impressed by the actress in the same manner that you yourself were."

"Of course she was, as any other decent young woman would have been; let alone being, as Paolina is, engaged to be married to the Marchese."

"I have no doubt, Signora, that your remarks are perfectly just. If the manners and conduct of the young women now-a-days were regulated a little more in conformity with the ideas of such persons of discretion as yourself, the world would be all the better for it. But I don't quite see how the behaviour of



the *prima donna* on the stage could have had anything to do with the circumstance of the Marchese Ludovico's engagement to the Signorina Foscarelli," said the lawyer, with the most demure innocence of manner.

"You don't see it, Signor Dottore. Perhaps you were not in the theatre that night. If you had been you would have seen it fast enough. The way she went on, when the Marchese Ludovico was a giving her a lovely nosegay of flowers—hothouse flowers, if you please—as big pretty near as this table; not just a throwing them on to the stage the way I've seen 'em do it many a time at the Fenice; but putting them into her hand; and she, the minx a coming up to the box to take 'em before all the people as bold as brass."

"Ah, I see? The Signorina Foscarelli naturally did not quite like that," said the lawyer, encouragingly.

"Like it! Who would have liked it in her place, I ask you? And that painted hussy a-going on the way she did; making such eyes at him, and smiling, and a-pressing her hand to her bosom, that was just as naked as my face; and looking for all the world as if she could have jumped right into the box, and eaten him up. Like it, indeed!"

"No doubt it was provoking enough. And your adopted daughter, Signora Steno, would not be the right-minded and well-brought-up girl I take her to be, if she did not express to you her disgust at such goings on," said the sympathizing lawyer.

"You may say that. She expressed it plain enough; and not to me only, but to the Marchese himself as well, when she saw him afterwards. She let him know

what she thought of the painted huzzy. And she told him, too, some more of the truth. She told him that the creature knew well enough what she was doing, or trying to do. The way she looked straight up at my poor child in the box, where we were, was enough to make the blood curdle in your veins. If ever I saw a face look hatred, it was the face of that woman when she looked up at our box. She looked at the poor child as if she could have taken her heart's blood. She did. Ah! bless your heart, *she* knew all about it. Talk of the old Marchese, indeed. Yes; the creature had set her mind upon being Marchesa di Castelmare. Not a doubt of it; but it was the nephew she wanted, not the uncle; and she knew that my Paolina stood in the way of her scheming; and Paolina knew that she knew it."

Old Orsola paused, out of breath with the length and vehemence of the tirade, which her feelings had prompted her to utter with crescendo violence. She was verbose; but the lawyer had listened with the most perfect patience and unflagging attention to every word she had uttered.

"It is, indeed, clear enough," he said, shaking his head, "that between two women so situated with reference to each other, there could have been no very kindly feeling. And it must be confessed that this unfortunate Bianca Lalli was, by all accounts, just the sort of woman that was likely to be a very dangerous rival."

"She; a common, impudent, low-lived, brazen-faced, worn-out Jezebel. No; not where my Paolina stood on the other side. She couldn't take the Marchese away from her with all her arts. And that's

why she went and put an end to herself. But she's gone—she's gone, where her painted face and her lures won't be of any more service to her. And so I won't say any evil of her. Not I. It's a good rule that tells us to speak well of the dead. *Ave, Maria gratiâ plena, ora pro nobis, nunc et in horâ mortis nostræ,*" said the old woman, crossing herself and casting up her eyes in attestation of the Christian nature of her sentiments.

"Amen!" said the lawyer, piously, while he waited to see if the exuberance of his visitor's feelings would lead her to throw any further light on the state of feeling that had existed between Paolina Foscarelli and the murdered woman.

"I always say and think, for my part," continued the old woman, perceiving that her companion sat silent, as if expecting her to continue the conversation; "I always think that the blessed Virgin knows what's best for us. Maybe it's just as well that that poor miserable creature did as she did. For we all know what men are, Signore Dottore; and there's no saying what hold she might have got upon the Marchese."

"And no doubt that is the feeling of our young friend Signorina Foscarelli?" said the sympathetic lawyer.

"To be sure,—to be sure it is," said the old woman, meaning to credit Paolina with the piety she had understood herself to have expressed; "she *did* take a mortal aversion and dislike to the woman, and small blame to her. But now she is gone, Paolina is no more likely to say anything against her than I am myself."

"Quite so, quite so. And I hope the magistrates may take the same view of the circumstances, that you have so judiciously expressed, Signora," said the lawyer, who was abundantly contented with the result of his interview with the Signora Steno, as it stood, and did not see any further necessity for prolonging it. "You may tell the Contessa Violante, if you should see her, that I am much obliged to her for having sent you to me," he added, as he rose to open the door of his sanctum for the old lady; "Beppo, open the door for the Signora Steno. Farewell, Signora, we shall meet again."

---

## CHAPTER II.

Was it Paolina after all?

ORSOLA STENO quitted the lawyer's studio as entirely contented with the result of her interview as she left him. She doubted not that she had fully impressed him with her own conviction as to the explanation of the mysterious circumstances of the singer's death; that Paolina's innocence would be readily recognized; and that her adopted daughter would shortly be restored to her in the Via di Sta. Eufemia.

The lawyer remained for some time seated in his chair in deep thought after his visitor had left him.

Suddenly he let his open hand fall heavily with a loud clap on the table before him, disturbing the papers on it from their places, and causing the fine blue sand, which stood in an open wooden basin for the purpose of doing the office of blotting-paper, to be spilled in all directions by the concussion, and said aloud, "BY GOD! THAT GIRL HAS DONE IT!"

"Ah, talk of the passions of men," he went on, in a lower muttering voice, after some further moments of meditation; "they are nothing—they are child's play compared to the blind animal-like impulses that force a woman's will into their service when any of the master passions of the sex are touched. A woman's jealousy; it is as plain as the sun at noonday. And we are puzzling our brains looking on this side and on that, to find a possible explanation of the facts. Talk of a tigress and her whelps! There's a young

girl who looks as innocent as a St. Agnes, and speaks as if butter would not melt in her mouth. Take—threaten to take—her lover from her, and she turns upon you like a scorpion at bay. *Furens quid femina possit.* Ay indeed. And they are all alike. That old woman there; why she was ready, with all her ‘Ave Marias’ and ‘Ora pro nobis,’ to kill the woman again if she were not killed already, out of pure sympathy with the wrong done to her adopted daughter. I don’t think there is a doubt about it. I should like to wager a hundred to one that the Venetian girl put her rival to death. The story is neither a new nor a strange one.”

“Whether the commission of the deed can be brought home to her,” he continued, after another period of musing, “that is another question; and one with which, however interesting it may be to my good friend Pietro Logarini, we need not trouble ourselves. And after all, what a good thing it is that things should have fallen out as they have. That old fool of a Marchese! It is a lesson to believe in nothing and no man, when one thinks of it. The death of that woman is the saving of the name. But, *per Bacco!* I must not say so too loudly,” thought the old lawyer to himself, with a grim smile, “or I shall be doing just what the old fool of a woman has been doing. Yes, that was the last link in the chain of the evidence we wanted. She was on the spot at the time—the death-dealing weapon was essentially a woman’s weapon, and the murdered woman was her feared and hated rival—and now we have direct evidence that she felt her to be such. If the judges can find any other hypothesis supported by stronger circumstantial evidence than

this—why, I think that I had better go to school again.”

With these thoughts in his mind, Signor Fortini determined to go and see his crony, Signor Pietro Logarini, at the Palazzo del Governo. He found that active and able official just returned from another visit to St. Apollinare in Classe, which appeared not to have been very fruitful of result.

“I can make nothing out of that old friar,” said the Police Commissary to his friend, as they sat in the private cabinet of the former; “and I am very much afraid that we shall make nothing out of him. For quiet, aggravating obstinacy and passive resistance, recommend me to a monk.”

“What induced you to go out there to-day?” asked the lawyer.

“Why, I am very strongly persuaded—I feel sure almost—that that old fellow could tell something to the purpose if he would speak. And I am more convinced of it from his manner to-day than ever. The other animal—the lay-brother—I am pretty sure knows nothing about it.”

“Is the friar about again, or still in bed?” said Fortini.

“Oh, he’s in bed safe enough; at least I found him there, shivering and shaking, and counting his beads, and answering a plain question with ‘Ave Maria’ and ‘Ora pro nobis,’ and the rest of it. I don’t believe he has the fever a bit. I believe that he has been scared out of his wits by something he has seen. But the devil wouldn’t get out of him what it was if he don’t choose to tell you. Oh, I know them!”

said the Commissary, provoked by his fruitless excursion.

"I suppose," said the lawyer, looking doubtfully into the Commissary's face, "I suppose it is not on the cards that the old fellow was the murderer himself?"

"Ha!" said the Commissary, with a start, "that is a new idea. But no," he added, after a little consideration,—“no, that's not it; it would be very difficult even to imagine any motive. An old man, eighty years old. No, it's not that. But, if I am not very much mistaken, he knows something.”

"In that case, I should have thought that means might have been found to make him speak," said the lawyer, drily.

"What means? I profess I don't know any. The devil of it is, you see, Signor Giovacchino, that it will not do to treat those fellows roughly. There would be the deuce and all to pay. There he lies, shivering, and trembling, and muttering, and going on as if he was imbecile; and swearing he is too ill to leave his bed. I don't see how we are to get him here into court."

"Well, I've had better luck this morning; and had not to go out to seek it. My witness came to me; and I think I have got some important evidence," said the lawyer, with much of the exultation of a successful sportsman over a less fortunate rival.

"The deuce you have. There is a luck in those things. But if your evidence came to you——Who the devil would ever think of coming to a Commissary of Police as long as they could stay away, if they pleased."



"Well, my witness was not altogether a willing one; or at least she came to me for the purpose of saying something very different from what she did say."

"But you did not come here merely to boast, I am sure, Signor Giovacchino. You are going to tell me what you have been able to learn, eh?" said the Commissary.

"Boast, no, not I! There's nothing to boast of. Besides, you know my interest in the matter is of a different nature from yours, Signor Pietro. All I want is to clear my friend and client, the Marchese Ludovico. You, of course, are anxious to bring the crime home to somebody."

"True," said the Commissary, nodding his head.

"And of course, therefore, any light I can throw upon the matter, I am ready enough to bring to you, unless it were of a nature to incriminate the Marchese," returned the lawyer.

"Of course, just so. And what you have learned this morning——"

"Tell's all t'other way; I have no difficulty in allowing that, on the first blush of the matter, I felt no doubt that the Marchese was the guilty party. It only shows that one ought always to have doubts of everything. It looked so very bad. The Marchese takes the girl into the wood, comes back without her, and very shortly afterwards she is found where he left her, murdered. And he is known to have had the greatest possible interest in getting rid of her. Would it not have seemed a clear case to any one?"

"So one would have said indeed," assented the Commissary.

"Well, the Marchese had nothing to do with it. At the present moment I feel—well, hardly any doubt at all that the deed was done by the girl Paolina Foscarelli."

"That's my notion too," said the Commissary, taking a pinch of snuff, and proffering his box to his visitor; "but what is the new evidence."

"Well, the girl lives, it seems, with an old woman, a country-woman of hers, a certain Orsola Steno. And this morning the old lady comes to my studio for the avowed purpose of begging me not to countenance in any way the very mistaken notion that her adopted daughter had murdered the *prima donna*; the truth being, as she was good enough to inform me, that the latter had committed suicide."

"Bah, what senseless nonsense!" interrupted the Commissary, indignantly.

"Of course. I pointed out to the old lady that her theory was, according to the medical testimony, simply impossible; but that naturally made not the slightest difference in her opinion of the matter. And then, aided by a little gentle assistance, she prattled on, an old fool, admitting, or insisting rather, that there had been bitter hatred and animosity between Paolina and the murdered woman; that Paolina had conceived the bitterest jealousy of the singer; that she was persuaded that the latter was scheming with a set purpose to lure her acknowledged lover, the Marchese, away from her; that she was further persuaded that the singer nourished the bitterest hatred of her, Paolina. What do you say to that, Signor Commissary? How does the land lie now, eh?" said the lawyer, triumphantly, in conclusion.

Signor Pietro nodded his head with most emphatic approbation and confirmation of his friend's opinion.

"Is not it the more likely story in every way?" pursued the lawyer; "just look at it. The Marchese is known to every man, woman, and child in Ravenna; and being known for what he is, it would be difficult to persuade anybody that he had lifted his hand to murder a defenceless and sleeping woman. But we can all of us easily understand that it is exceedingly likely that he may have so behaved as to make these two women furiously jealous of each other; at least to have made this girl Paolina, to whom, it seems, he had promised marriage, desperately furious against the other, whom she had but too good reason to suspect of having attracted the preference of the Marchese. Then look at the instrument with which the murder was accomplished,—a needle. Is it in any way likely that the Marchese Ludovico should habitually carry such a thing about with him? Is there any unlikelihood that the girl may have had such a thing about her; *Amico mio Pietro*," said the lawyer, in conclusion, tapping his fingers on the Commissary's coat-sleeve as he spoke, "that Venetian girl is the murderess! The deed was done under the influence of maddening jealousy."

"How on earth could that old woman come to you with a budget of such damning facts against her friend? Do you think she—the old woman—has any guilty knowledge of the crime?"

"Lord bless you, no! If she had, she would not have been so simple. No, she firmly believes her own theory of the matter, that the poor Diva killed herself. She is too firmly persuaded of it to perceive the bear-

ing of her admissions of the hatred that existed between the two girls."

"I learned something yesterday," said the Commissary, "which all looks the same way,—not much, but in such a case every little helps. This old friar—this Padre Fabiano—is, we know, a Venetian; and now I have ascertained that, years ago, before he came here, there was some connection of some sort—acquaintance, friendship of whatever kind you like—between him and the parents of the girl Paolina. I think it likely enough that the frate's friendship was more particularly with the girl's mother rather than with her father,—we know what friars' ways are, and, maybe, we should not go far wrong if we imagined that the Father had reason to feel a fatherly interest of a quite special kind in the young lady. Now all this is worth only just this. Why did the frate return from the Pineta in such a state of terror, agitation, and horror? Why, supposing him to have seen, or in any way become acquainted with facts calculated to produce such an effect upon him, does he obstinately refuse to give us any information upon the subject? How will this answer fit? In the course of that walk to the Pineta, undertaken, no doubt, because the old man felt anxiety as to what was likely to follow from the probable meeting of the two girls after the scene witnessed in his presence by Paolina from the window of the church—in the course of that walk, let us suppose, the friar became acquainted with the fact that this girl—his daughter, we will say, for, in all probability, she is such—had murdered her rival. The knowledge of the fact sends him back to his cell half dead with horror and fright. His interest in Paolina ties his

tongue, and frustrates all our efforts to get any explanation from him. How will that do, eh, Signor Giovacchino?"

"Admirably well. Clearly helps to give consistency and probability to our theory of the facts. I begin to think that all danger to my client is at an end, and, upon my word, I am more glad of it than I can tell you; it would have been a shocking thing. I am an old Ravenna man, you know, and should have felt it differently from what you would, you know."

"True; but I am glad enough that the Marchese should be cleared in the matter, and so will the Government be—very glad."

"I suppose there is no objection to my seeing the Marchesino?"

"Oh, certainly not the least in the world. It is a pity that he should be detained here any longer; but I am almost afraid to take the responsibility of discharging him before some formal inquiry has been made."

"Naturally, naturally. When do you suppose you will be ready to bring the affair to a trial?"

"Oh, very soon. If there were any chance of getting that old frate into court it would be worth while to wait for him; but I am afraid that the longer we wait the worse his fever and ague will get. But I shall have another try at him out there first."

And with that Signor Fortini passed to the chamber in which the Marchese Ludovico was confined.

---

## CHAPTER III.

Could it have been the Aged Friar?

"SIGNOR MARCHESE," said the old man, stretching out his hand with, for him, a very unusual degree of impulsive cordiality, "I have come to make *amende honorable*—I need hardly say how delighted I am to do so. It is not only that I think I may say there is now very little chance of any mischief falling on you in consequence of that unlucky excursion to the Pineta, but that I am able, thank God, to say that I have myself no longer the smallest suspicion that you had any hand in the crime that has been committed there."

"Has anything been discovered, then?" asked Ludovico, eagerly. "Ah—h—h! that would be good news indeed," added the young man, drawing a long breath of relief,—the evident strength of which feeling afforded a measure of the suffering he had endured more indicative of the real state of his mind than any amount of depression which he had before allowed to be apparent.

"Well; enough, I think, has been discovered to relieve you of all suspicion—enough, as I said, to convince my own mind very satisfactorily that you are innocent of all complicity in the matter."

"I confess that I should have preferred, Signor Fortini, that my own assertion should have sufficed to produce that conviction," replied the young man, somewhat drily.

"My dear Signor Marchese, permit me to say that

wonder that he was loth to tell it, for it is not much calculated to increase his popularity in the city."

"Why, what is it? I never used to think anything worse of him than that he was a fool," rejoined the Marchese.

"A fool, and a very mischievous and malicious one, as fools mostly are. What do you think took him out of the city that morning of the first day in Lent? Simply the desire to play the spy on you and the poor woman who has been killed."

"No, you don't mean it? the noxious animal!" exclaimed Ludovico, with intense disgust.

"It seems that he overheard you and the singer make your appointment for the excursion, and that, moved by curiosity and the hope of making mischief, he determined to be beforehand with you on the road, and picking up, if he could, the means of paying off both the lady and yourself for some of the mortification your ridicule had caused him," said the lawyer.

"I could not have believed it possible; the mean-spirited spiteful wretch! I did not think he had it in him!" said Ludovico.

"A man is apt to be spiteful towards those who cause him to suffer greatly. And there is no suffering greater to a man as vain as the Conte Leandro than the mortification of his vanity. But his spitefulness has been punished: first, by a couple of days' imprisonment, and a fright which half killed him; and secondly, by the sort of reception which you may suppose awaited him when he was released as the result of his explanation. I think he has had his due," added the lawyer, grimly.

"But how does his explanation exclude the pos-

sibility that he may have been the assassin after all? Why may not the same mortified vanity that incited him to play the spy, have moved him to take deadly vengeance on the woman he hated so bitterly? The man who was capable of the one is likely enough to be capable of the other. He is the man who may fairly be suspected of being capable of stabbing a woman as she slept!" argued the Marchese, with intense indignation.

"No," said the lawyer, shaking his head; "depend upon it we did not let him go till it was made clear that he could have had no hand in the crime. He was able to prove beyond the possibility of a doubt, that he had returned to the city, entering it by the Porta Sisi, before the earliest time when the murder could have been committed. No; that notion has to be abandoned."

"And no other idea has been started?—no suspicion? Have the investigations of the police led to nothing?" asked Ludovico, with profound discouragement.

The lawyer shook his head. "I have told you," he said, "how the case stands, Signor Marchese. An idea was started at one moment that the old friar at St. Apollinare might have been the man. Strangely enough he also was in or near the Pineta much about the same time. But the total absence of all assignable motive—an infirm octogenarian; no, that is not it. But the truth is, Signor Marchese, that our inquiries with reference to this Padre Fabiano have brought to light facts which tend to make the case stronger against the girl Paolina Foscarelli."

"I tell you, Signor Fortini, that the notion of her



... and to let  
... be sure: a  
... not be  
... and let

## CHAPTER IV.

What Ravenna thought of it.

SIGNOR FORTINI had rather mitigated than exaggerated the truth in speaking to the Marchese Ludovico of his uncle's state of mind. During all these days his condition was truly deplorable. He had never, in all this time, left the Palazzo, and had scarcely left his own chamber. He absolutely refused to see anybody save Signor Fortini. He could not sleep by night, or remain at rest in the same place for half-an-hour together during the day.

Of course he could attend to none of the numerous duties—mostly labours of benevolence—that usually occupied his time. His servants thought that he was losing his reason; yet, in the midst of all the terrible distress that was weighing him down, the usual kindness and considerate benevolence of his nature and habitual conduct had shone out. The only one thing that he had given any attention to was the gratification of the wishes, and the promotion of the welfare, of an old servant.

Niccolò, the old groom who was mentioned, as the reader may, perhaps, remember, on the occasion of a certain conversation which Lawyer Fortini had with him, as having been all his life in the service of the Marchese, and of his father before him, was getting, as he had himself remarked to the lawyer, almost too old for his work. He had always hitherto absolutely refused, with the masterful obstinacy of an old favourite,

all proposals of retirement; but, on the next morning but one after the fatal Ash-Wednesday, while the Marchese had been in such a state of painful agitation that he could hardly bear to be addressed by his own servant, he had, to the great surprise of all the household, sent for old Niccolò, who had remained with him more than an hour.

On coming out from the interview the old groom said that he had himself asked for the audience his master had given him; but it did not seem at all clear to the other servants when or how he could have done so. He said that he had spoken to his master on the subject long before; and how kind and good it was of the Marchese to think of his old servant's affairs in all his trouble. His master had arranged for him, he said, what he had long wished for, though it seemed to all the household that old Niccolò had always rejected any proposal of the sort. He was to have a pension, and go to live with a niece of his who was married in Rome.

It was odd that none of his fellow-servants had ever heard anything of any such niece. But old Niccolò was not a man of a communicative turn; and perhaps nothing had ever chanced to lead him to speak of her. Now he was to join her at once; he was to start for Faenza that very afternoon, so as to catch there the diligence from Bologna to Rome.

But why such a sudden start? Why should he go off and leave them all, at a few hours' notice.

Well, the fact was, that the day after the morrow was his niece's birthday. And he thought he should like to give her the joyful surprise of seeing her old uncle and learning the new arrangements on that day.

And his dear thoughtful master, who was always so kind to everybody, had entered into his scheme, and so arranged it.

And so it was; old Niccolò was gone to Rome as he had said. But he had given nobody any address by which to find him in the Eternal City. And a little jealousy, perhaps, was felt at the good fortune which had thus befallen one out of several who would have liked the same. But all admitted that it was a remarkable proof of the thoughtful kindness of the Marchese in the midst of his own troubles.

And how terribly those troubles pressed on him was evident to the whole household; and, by means of their reports, to the entire city. Everybody in Ravenna knew with how heavy a hand affliction had fallen upon the Marchese Lamberto. And everybody talked of it. Sympathizing pity and blame were mingled in the judgments which were being passed on the Marchese every hour, and in every place where men or women met; and the proportions in which they were mingled differed greatly. None, however, could fail to see and to admit that the fall from the high pinnacle, on which the Marchese had stood, had been a very terrible one. It was felt that it was a fall from which he could never, under any circumstances, entirely recover.

The women were, for the most part, more indulgent to him than the men. As for the unfortunate Bianca, they held that a righteous and deserved judgment had fallen upon her, in which the operation of the finger of Providence was distinctly visible. To be sure it was a signal warning to all men, as to the evils which might be expected to flow from any sipping of the Circean cup which such creatures proffered to their

lips. But what fate could be too bad for the Siren herself? To think of the audacity, the shameless effrontery of such an one in daring to spread her lures; and wind her enchantments around such a man as the Marchese di Castelmare. Of course he, poor man, could not but feel her death as a terrible shock. What he had set his heart on had been violently and awfully taken away from him. And how true it is that the blessed Saints know what is most truly for our good! But what is all that to the dreadful accusation hanging over the Marchese Ludovico? A Castelmare in the prison of Ravenna under accusation of murder! And if it really *were* the case, that the unfortunate young man, driven by the prospect of being hurled down from his position and robbed of his inheritance, had done this deed, how great, how terrible, must be the remorse of the Marchese Lamberto!

It was curiously characteristic of the moral nature and habits of thought of the people, that the Marchese Ludovico, even on the hypothesis that he had committed the murder, was very leniently judged for his share in the tragedy.

The men were more inclined to bear hard on the Marchese Lamberto. An old fool! at his time of life, to offer marriage to such a woman as La Bianca. To disgrace his name; to cover himself with ridicule; and, above all, and worst of all, to behave with such infamous injustice to his nephew. Nevertheless the tragedy was so shocking and so complete, that even those who were disposed to condemn his conduct the most severely, could not but feel compassion for so crushing a weight of misfortune.

As the opinion, however, began to gain ground in

the city, that the Marchesino Ludovico had, after all, not been the author of the murder; that the first impression, however clearly the circumstances seemed, at the first blush of the thing, to point to it, was a mistaken one; and that the far more probable opinion was that the Venetian girl, Paolina Foscarelli, was the murderess, and jealousy the incentive to her crime, the compassion for the Marchese Lamberto became proportionably less. The feeling was rather, that as far as he was concerned he had got nothing worse than what he richly deserved. And who should say that all was not upon the whole for the best as it had pleased heaven to cause it to fall out? The Marchese Lamberto was saved, despite his own folly, from a disgraceful and degrading marriage; and Ludovico was saved from the ruin which threatened him.

Nor, muttered the more cynical, was that all the good that was involved in what, at first sight, seemed so great a misfortune. Ludovico, too, was prevented from doing a foolish thing. It was a very different matter in his case from that of his uncle: he would be doing no wrong to any heir; and he was at that time of life when men do fall in love, and are excusable if they are led by it into doing foolish things; not to mention that, after all, the marriage he had proposed to make was a very different one from such a monstrous alliance as the Marchese Lamberto had meditated.

But still was it not a great blessing that the Marchesino should be prevented from throwing himself away in that manner? The first match in Ravenna to

be carried off by an obscure and plebeian Venetian artist. Truly it was all for the best as it was.

In their different degree these two stranger women were both noxious, dangerous, and had done more mischief in Ravenna than the lives of either of them were worth. And if Providence had in its wisdom decreed that they should mutually counteract and abolish each other—why it would belove them to see in it a signal instance of the overruling wisdom of Heaven.

In the meantime, however, while every imaginable variety and modification of the above ideas and opinions were forming the staple of every conversation in every street, house, café, and piazza of Ravenna, the two men, whose conduct was thus canvassed, were assuredly suffering no light measure of retribution for aught that they had done amiss.

To Ludovico the tidings which reached him of the favourable turn matters were taking as to the probability of his having himself to answer for the murder of the singer, were neutralized in any effect they might otherwise have had of bringing him happiness, by the fact that he was exculpated only in exact proportion to the increasing probability that Paolina might be held guilty of the crime.

If, in truth, he carried in his own bosom the consciousness of his own guilt, it may easily be imagined how horrible to him would appear the prospect of escaping from the consequences of it by such means. And if that were, indeed, the dreadful truth, the repeated declarations which he had made to Signor Fortini to the effect that, rather than see Paolina condemned as guilty, he would confess himself to be the

murderer, would in no wise appear as mere ebullitions of his determination to save at all price the girl he loved.

But, during those days Ludovico suffered, he either bore his sufferings with much more of manly self-command than did his uncle, or else his agony was (as Signor Fortini, who saw them both, could testify) much less severe than that which seemed to be slowly dragging down the Marchese Lamberto to the grave.

The lawyer had told Ludovico that he was then going to his uncle; and, in fact, he did so. But the old man dreaded doing so more than he could have himself believed that he could have feared any similar duty.

In truth, the condition of the Marchese Lamberto was pitiable.

He would see no one, save Fortini; but he was most anxious for his visits—very naturally anxious to hear from day to day, and almost from hour to hour, how matters were going—whether any new circumstances had been discovered; what change there was in the probabilities as to the final judgment respecting the crime; and there was a restless feverishness in his anxiety, a shattered condition of the nervous system that made the lawyer seriously fear that the Marchese's reason would sink under the strain.

He had again and again urged him to allow a medical man to see him; and had once mentioned the Marchese's old friend Professor Tomosarchi. But the irritated violence with which the suffering man had rejected the proposal, had been such as to lead the lawyer to think that he should be doing more harm than good by reiterating it.



It was not surprising, indeed, that the Marchese should be utterly beaten down and vanquished by the misfortunes that had fallen upon him; they attacked him from such various and opposite sides. His love for Bianca—or, let me say (in order to satisfy readers who are wont to weigh the real meaning of words as well as those who are in the habit of taking them unexamined at their current value), his longing to possess her—was genuine and intense. The step he had determined to take gives the measure of his eagerness in the pursuit of her—of his conviction that he could not live without her; and the object of this great, this intense, this all-mastering passion had been snatched away from him; the unappeasable agony of such a bereavement can, perhaps, only be adequately measured by those who have felt it.

Then all the evils which, despite his shrinking from them, he had faced for the sake of gratifying this imperious passion, had fallen upon him as fatally as though the price of his facing them had been paid to him. All the loss of credit, of respect, of social station, which he had found it so dreadful to contemplate, had been incurred—and for nothing. How long and terrible had been the struggle, which of those two incompatible objects of his intense desire—Bianca, or the social position he held in the eyes of his fellow-citizens—he should sacrifice to the other; it had seemed to him so impossible to give up either that the necessity of choosing between them had almost unhinged his reason. And now he was doomed to forego them both.

Then, again, Ludovico, and the dreadful position in which he stood! and, if he were condemned, on

whose head would fall the blame of the disgrace which would thus overwhelm the family name? If his nephew were held to be guilty of this crime, would not all the odium of having driven him to it fall on him?

Truly there was wherewithal to bow down a stronger heart and head than those of the Marchese Lamberto.

According to Fortini's view of the matter, the tidings which he had to bring the Marchese that morning ought to have gone far to tranquillize and comfort him. Let it be shown that the heir to the Castelmare name and honours had *not* committed a terrible crime, and was *not* in danger of being convicted of it, and, in his opinion, all the worst of the evils which had fallen on the Marchese were at an end. That was the only really irreparable mischief; the city would have its laugh at the Marchese for his sensibility to the charms of such a charmer as the singer. But even that would be quenched by the startling change of the comedy into a tragedy. The Marchese had shown that he was no wiser than many another man; and it would be but a nine days' wonder; and as to the mere loss of the woman who had done all the mischief, the lawyer had no patience with the mention of it as a loss at all.

Pshaw! The one really important matter was to clear the heir of the house of all complicity in the crime of murder; and yet the lawyer had a strong feeling, from what he had already seen of the Marchese, that the good news of which he was the bearer in that respect would not give the Marchese all the comfort that it ought to give him.

And the result of the visit to the Palazzo Castelmare, which he paid immediately after leaving the Marchesino Ludovico in his prison, perfectly responded to his anticipations in this respect.

---

## CHAPTER V.

### "Miserrimus."

HE found the Marchese in a state which really seemed to threaten his life or his reason. It would scarcely be correct to say of him that he was depressed, for that phrase is hardly consistent with the feverish condition of excitement in which he was. There was evidence enough in his appearance of the presence of deep-seated and torturing misery, especially devastating in the case of men of his race, constituted as they are with nervous systems of great delicacy, and unendowed with that robustness of fibre which enables the more strongly-fashioned scions of the northern peoples to stand up against misfortune, and present a bold front to adversity.

There is no connection in the minds of this race between the repression and control of emotion and their ideal of virile dignity. Reticence is impossible to them. The Italian man, it is true, has been often described as eminently reticent; and the northern popular conception represents him as apt to seek the attainment of his object by the concealment of it. Nor is that representation an erroneous one. But the two statements are in no wise inconsistent. The Italian man is by nature, habit, and training an adept at concealing his *thoughts*; he rarely or never seeks to conceal his *emotions*.

Whether there were thoughts in the Marchese's mind, which he had no wish or intention to disclose

to his visitor, might be a matter of speculation to the latter. But he certainly made no attempt to hide the misery which was consuming him. The outward appearance of the man was eloquent enough of the disorder within. He had always been wont to be especially neat and precise in his dress; clean shaven, and with that look of bright freshness on his clear-complexioned and well-rounded cheeks, which is specially suggestive of health, happiness, and well-to-do prosperity. Now his cheeks were hollow and yellow, and grisly stubble of uncared-for beard, covered his deeply-lined jaws. He was dressed, if dressed it could be called, in a large loose chamber wrapper, the open neck of which, and of the shirt beneath it, allowed the visitor's eye to mark that the emaciation which a few days of misery and anxiety had availed to cause, was not confined to his face only.

But yet more remarkable was the terrible state of nervous restlessness from which he was evidently suffering. He was unable to remain quiet in his easy chair even while his visitor remained with him. He would every now and then rise from it without reason, and pace the room for two or three turns with the uneasy objectless manner of a wild animal confined to a cage. Again and again he would go to the window, and gaze from it, as though looking for some expected thing or person. He spoke and behaved as if he had been most anxious for the coming of the lawyer, and yet, now he was there, he seemed scarcely able to command his attention sufficiently to take interest in the tidings Signor Fortini brought him.

"Thank God, Signor Marchese, the news I bring is good. Thank God, I am able to express to you my

conscientious opinion that the Marchese Ludovico had no more to do with the murder of this unfortunate woman than I had. And such is now the general opinion throughout the city."

"Is there anything new? Has any—any—discovery been made?" said the Marchese, and his teeth chattered in his head as he spoke.

"Nothing that I can quite call a discovery," returned the lawyer; "but small circumstances in such a case as this, when carefully put together, form a clue, which rarely fails, when one has enough of them, to lead up to the desired truth."

"Ah!—small circumstances, as you say—yes—but circumstances—eh?—do they not often—must we not be very careful—eh?" and the Marchese shook as he spoke, till the lawyer really began to think that he must be labouring under an attack of the same illness that had seized on father Fabiano.

"Fortunately, Signor Marchese, the circumstances all point, in the present instance, in the direction we would wish. That is," added the lawyer, hastily, "God forbid that I should wish such a crime to be brought home to any human being, but in the interests of truth and justice; and of course our first object is that the Marchese Ludovico should be cleared."

"Of course, of course. Why naturally, you know —But—in what direction—eh?—do the suspicions—that is, the opinions—you, yourself, Signor Giovacchino—who do you think now could have done the deed?" said the Marchese, finishing his sentence with an apparent effort.

"My notion is," said the lawyer, speaking strongly

and distinctly, "that the murder was committed by the Venetian girl, Paolina Foscarelli. You are aware of the circumstances that first directed suspicion towards her. Alone they are very strong; but some other little matters have come out. She has now been examined several times; and the account she gives of the hours that passed between the time she left the church of St. Apollinare, and the time when she was first seen afterwards is a very lame and unsatisfactory one. Then, my friend, Signor Logarini, of the police, who has been most praiseworthy active in the matter, has discovered that the old friar, who has the charge of the Basilica, and who is a Venetian, was connected with the parents of this girl, which renders it extremely probable that he may wish to screen her; and that fact, taken in conjunction with the very strong reasons we have to think that the friar has some knowledge of the deed, and his very manifest reluctance to tell what he knows, seems to point in the same direction."

"The friar at St. Apollinare," said the Marchese, with blue trembling lips, as he looked keenly into the lawyer's face; "why it is impossible that he could know anything about it. The friar——"

"Impossible? why impossible, Signor Marchese? We know that he was in the Pineta much about the time the deed must have been done."

The Marchese threw himself back in his deep easy chair, and covered his face with his hand. The lawyer paused, and shook his head as he looked at him.

"The friar in the Pineta!" he exclaimed, getting up from his chair after a minute or two, and taking a few disorderly steps across the room.

"You see, Signor Giovacchino," he continued, returning to his seat, "I have been so shaken by all the misery I have gone through, and all the sleepless nights I have passed, that—that—that I am hardly in a fit state to appreciate the value of the—the facts you lay before me. I have been trying to think—I am afraid—very much afraid for my own part that no weight is to be attributed to any testimony which may be got from the friar of St. Apollinare."

"Why so, Signor Marchese?" asked the lawyer, shortly.

"I know the old man very well. I have often talked with him. He is not in his right mind: certainly not in such a state of mind as would justify the magistrates in paying any attention to his statements," said the Marchese, in a more decided manner than he had before spoken.

"I spoke with the old man at some length the other day, and I cannot say that that was my impression at all. In my opinion he was quite enough in his senses to know how to withhold the information which, I suspect, he could give us if he would. May I ask, Signor Marchese, how long it is since you have spoken with him?"

"Oh! a long time. How could I speak to him, you know. I do not suppose he often comes into the city. And it is ever so long—a year or more—since I was out at St. Apollinare, as far as I can remember," said the Marchese, with a rapid sidelong glance at the lawyer; "but I am convinced the old man is not in his right mind," he added, not without some vehemence; "and it is dangerous to put any faith, or to build at all upon anything that such a person may say. Why,



he is always seeing visions; and what is such an one's account worth of anything he may fancy himself to have seen."

"Well, Signor Marchese, the tribunal will form its own opinion upon that point. For my own part, I cannot help feeling glad of any scrap of evidence which tends to corroborate the opinion that the Marchese Ludovico has been erroneously and precipitately accused."

"Of course, Signor Giovacchino, of course. *A chi lo dite!* And I am truly obliged to you for coming to me with the news you have given me. But you can understand, perhaps—in part, Signor Giovacchino, in part—not altogether—what I have gone through in these days. My mind has been shaken—sadly shaken, *amico mio*. I shall never recover it—never," said the Marchese, letting his head fall on his bosom.

"Nay, Signor Marchese. I would fain hope it is not so bad as all that. Let this business of the trial be over, and the Marchese Ludovico, as I doubt not, entirely cleared and absolved, and all will yet go well. The rest is matter of sorrow which time may be trusted to heal."

"The trial! Ay, the trial. When—eh?—when is it likely to come off, Signor Giovacchino. Yes, as you say, it would be a good thing if that were over," said the Marchese, with a manner that indicated a high state of nervous irritability.

"It won't be long; there is little or no hope of any further light being thrown on the matter; some day next week, I should say; I don't think they will be longer than that; and the sooner the better—only

that I am afraid you may find the ordeal a disagreeable one."

"Who? I? Why should I——? That is, of course, on Ludovico's account——"

"Excuse me, Signor Marchese; but you must feel, surely, that it will be absolutely necessary for you to be present in court."

"I? I be present? Why, don't you see that I am unable to leave my chamber—shall probably never leave it again; how can I be present in court? It is out of the question."

"Your lordship will pardon me, Signor Marchese, if I point out to you that it is quite indispensable that you should appear in court on the occasion of the trial," returned the lawyer, firmly. "Your own excellent judgment, and sense of what is fitting and due to your own position, will, I am sure, put this matter in an unmistakeable light before you. Think a little what the inferences, the remarks, the suggestions would be to which your absence on such an occasion would give rise; not to mention that it can hardly be doubted that the tribunal will think it necessary to examine your lordship respecting certain points——"

"Me? What can I tell? What can it be necessary to examine me for? I know absolutely nothing; it is impossible that I should know anything of the matter; besides, I am too ill to leave my chamber."

"Of course, if Tomosarchi were, after visiting you by direction of the tribunal, to certify that you were not in a fit state——"

"I won't see Tomosarchi; no testimony can be

needed to the fact that I am in no condition to leave the house; I tell you, Signor Fortini, I will not see him; I cannot see anybody."

"I fear, Signor Marchese, that it would be impossible in any other way to avoid complying with the request of the tribunal for your presence. Besides that, it would be far better, in every point of view, that you should show yourself in the court. The fact of your absence on such an occasion could not but be unpleasantly remarked on," urged the lawyer.

"Why? What can I be wanted for? What can I tell them? It is very evident that I am, and must needs be, utterly ignorant of the whole matter," returned the Marchese.

"There are various points on which the magistrates will, doubtless, wish for the information which your lordship can give them, although you may have no means of throwing any light on the main facts of the assassination. They will wish, for instance, to ask respecting the circumstances of the Marchese Ludovico's expedition to the Pineta. The police, you must remember, Signor Marchese, are already aware that you were cognizant of the Marchese Ludovico's intention of taking La Lalli to the Pineta. That has been ascertained from the admission of the Conte Leandro——"

"A thousand curses on the Conte Leandro!" exclaimed the Marchese.

"His figure in the matter is a deplorable one, truly; but you can understand, Signor Marchese, that the court will desire to ask some questions of you on this head—nothing that you can have any difficulty in answering or any objection to answer; but I am sure

you will see, on consideration, that it would have a very bad effect for your lordship to show the least desire to avoid being present."

"It will be most distasteful to me—very painful, indeed—I don't think it ought to be required of me under all the circumstances," pleaded the unhappy man.

"Unpleasant it will be, doubtless; the whole affair has not been a pleasant one for anybody concerned in it, Signor Marchese—for any one in Ravenna, I may say. But you may depend upon it that it will be the wish of the court and of everybody present to make it as little painful to you as possible. And it is my very serious and very urgent advice to you to make the necessary exertion, and not to express to any one either the intention or the wish to absent yourself."

And then the lawyer took his leave—not surprised that the Marchese, broken down and in the state in which he saw him, should feel it very disagreeable to face his fellow citizens on the occasion of the trial; but, perhaps, having some other thoughts in his mind besides those he expressed as to the ill effect likely to be produced by any refusal of the Marchese to make his appearance in the court.

## CHAPTER VI.

## The Trial.

THE police authorities were longer in preparing their case than Signor Fortini had anticipated they would be; but at length it was known throughout the city that the day for the trial had been fixed. It was to take place on a Monday morning towards the latter part of Lent.

It had been rumoured in the city that the delay had been occasioned by hopes which the authorities had conceived that the female prisoner would be induced to make confession of the crime. The imprisonment and the repeated interrogatories she had undergone had produced a great effect upon her. She had become downcast to a very much greater degree than she had been in the days immediately following her arrest. She was very silent, refraining even from the earnest and frequent protestations of her innocence, which, during the early days of her imprisonment, she had seized every opportunity of making. She passed many hours apparently plunged in deep introspective thought; she wept much, and passed much of her time in prayer.

And the judgment of the experienced people about her led them to interpret these manifestations as signs of an approaching confession. When at length the day for the trial was fixed, it was reported that Paolina Foscarelli had confessed. But the criminal authorities

keep the secrets of their prison house in such matters; and nothing certain was known upon the subject.

The very general impression, however, throughout the city was that, whether she confessed or not, she was the real criminal, and that such would be declared by the tribunal to be the case. And such a solution of the mystery was readily accepted by the Ravenna world as the most satisfactory that under the unhappy circumstances could be arrived at.

The disgrace that rested on the city in consequence of the perpetration of so foul a crime, and on such a victim, had been felt throughout the city to a degree, that can be duly appreciated only by those, who are acquainted with the strength and the exclusiveness of Italian municipal patriotism. And it was a matter of general congratulation that the perpetrator of it should turn out to be no Ravennate citizen, but an unknown stranger from Venice. It would have been dreadful indeed if such a deed should have been brought home to the door of a scion of the oldest and most distinguished noble family in Ravenna. Of course everybody had all along known, and had said from the beginning, that whatever might turn out to be the truth, this at least was impossible and altogether out of the question.

To many minds the guilt of the Venetian girl seemed so clear that it appeared altogether superfluous to spend time and trouble in bringing her to confess it. Her hatred of the victim she had confessed; and the confession of it was in evidence. The motive for that hatred was perfectly well known and understood. It was a motive that many a time ere now had led to similar deeds. She was close at hand when the crime must have been committed. She could give no satis-

factory account of her reasons for going thither, or of the occupation of her time during the hours, which must have comprised the moment of the assassination. And the manner of the murder rendered it infinitely probable that it must have been the deed of a female. What more could be wanted? It was rarely that a murder had ever been brought home to the murderer by circumstantial evidence of a more conclusive and irresistible character.

Signor Fortini was among those who thought and reasoned thus. But in the several interviews which he had had with the Marchese Ludovico, he had not judged it judicious to enlarge to him on this part of the subject. While assuring him that he might make himself perfectly easy, and that his innocence in the matter would beyond all doubt be fully recognised, he had preferred to lead him to imagine that the result of the trial would be altogether negative; that it would be found that no case that would warrant a conviction could be made out against any party.

Signor Logarini had meanwhile made one or two more excursions to the Basilica of St. Apollinare. But he had gained nothing by his pains. The padre Fabiano was on each occasion found in bed, no whit better to all appearance than he had been on that day when the police Commissary and Signor Fortini visited him together. Nor had Signor Logarini's persevering cross-examinations availed to obtain anything more from the aged friar than repetitions of his first statements. Nevertheless the Commissary was confirmed more than ever in his opinion that the friar knew something; if he could only be made to speak. Still it had been determined not to attempt to bring the old man

by force before the tribunal. There was every reason to think that nothing would be obtained from him in addition to what he had already said. In all probability he was really ill, more or less, as Signor Logarini said; and living under the government of the Holy Father, it was necessary to treat ecclesiastical personages with a greater degree of consideration than might have been accorded to such under similar circumstances on the other side of the frontier between the territory of the church and Austria.

Despite the friar's illness, however, Fra Simone, the lay-brother, had once or twice been observed lately in Ravenna. He was seen sauntering through the streets with his long linen wallet over his shoulder, stopping at a corner for a little gossip here, and receiving a contribution to the store in his bag from some friar-loving devout old woman there. There was nothing remarkable in such a sight in the streets of Ravenna in any way. Only Fra Simone was very rarely seen there. And when Signor Pietro Logarini, without whose knowledge scarcely a cat stirred abroad in Ravenna, was told of the circumstance, he said to himself that the Padre Fabiano was interested in knowing what people said and thought of the coming trial.

Signor Fortini had in the meantime, not without infinite difficulty succeeded in persuading the Marchese that he must bring himself to submit to the ordeal of being present in the court on the occasion of the trial. The Marchese's extreme dislike to appearing thus publicly had been in no degree overcome or diminished. And it was only the lawyer's positive and repeated declaration, that he would assuredly be sent for, if he



did not spontaneously present himself, that had availed to induce him to say at length that he would go.

Every possible attention, the lawyer had assured him, would be paid to him, and everything done to make his attendance as little disagreeable to him as possible. Of course, as Fortini urged, it was well known through the city how dreadfully he must have been affected by the sad circumstances that had happened—people would be prepared to see him looking ill and changed. Curious? Yes, of course people were curious—it was impossible to prevent them from being so; but he, Fortini, would take care that their curiosity should not be manifested in any way that could be offensive to the Marchese.

Thus, an unwilling consent to attend the sitting of the court on the morning of the trial had been forced from the unhappy Marchese,—from him who, so few weeks ago before the fatal coming of the fascinating singer to Ravenna, had been the happiest, the most prosperous, and the most secure of men; and it had been arranged that Signor Fortini should, on that morning, call for him at the Palazzo and accompany him to the tribunal.

When the morning came it seemed to Signor Fortini as if he should have to do all his work over again. He found the Marchese up and dressed. He had not shaved himself, however, declaring, with abundant appearance of truth, that, in the state he then was, it was utterly beyond his power to do so, and he absolutely refused to allow it to be done for him; and the effect of the stubbly grised beard of a week's growth or so on the hollow lantern jaws, which all the city had been accustomed to see clean shaved, and

plump, and florid with health, was such as to render him barely recognizable as the same man by the eyes that had known him all his life. It seemed, too, to the lawyer that the shocking change which had taken place in him was even more painfully marked by his attempt to dress himself in his usual manner than it had been in his chamber wrapper. His clothes, which were wont to fit so well, and set off to advantage his well-made and stalwart figure, hung about him in bags and pantaloon-like folds, a world too wide for his shrunken form.

On the first entrance of the lawyer he protested that the effort was altogether beyond his strength,—that it was impossible for him to go through the ordeal. Did they want him to die before their eyes on the benches of the court?

A renewed suggestion by Fortini to the effect that the only means by which the necessity could be avoided would be by a certificate from the medical authority trusted in such matters by the court—his own old friend the Professor Tomosarchi, produced only a reiterated and violent declaration that he would not receive any visit from the Professor.

Eventually, the strong representations made by the lawyer of the much greater unpleasantness, and the very much to be deprecated effect, of entering the court as an unwilling witness in forced obedience to a mandate from the tribunal, decided the wretched Marchese to allow himself to be led down to the carriage.

Even as he came, bent and shaking, down the great staircase of the Palazzo leaning on Fortini's arm, and had to pass, in crossing the hall to the carriage, all the servants of his household, most of whom had

not seen him since the evening of the last day of Carnival, and who were urged by curiosity to take this opportunity of looking at their terribly-changed master, it seemed to him that his martyrdom had commenced.

He passed through the streets of the city with the blinds of the carriage drawn down, and with his eyes closed as he lay thrown back into the corner of it: but, as he felt it draw up at the entrance to the "prefettura," he suddenly grasped the lawyer's hand, and Fortini felt, with a shudder, that his hand was as cold as that of a corpse. He was altogether in such a state that Signor Fortini began to fear that there really would be some catastrophe in the court before the business of the day could be concluded.

With the aid of a servant on one side and of the lawyer on the other, however, he was got out of the carriage, and, almost supporting him, the lawyer, who had made all his arrangements previously, led him into the building by a private door and to the chamber in which the tribunal was sitting by a private passage used only by the magistrates, and opening into the court in the immediate vicinity of the seats occupied by them, by the side of which a chair had been assigned to the Marchese.

Nor had Signor Fortini's cares and preparations ended there. He had spoken with each one of the magistrates who were to try the case, in no wise telling them of the Marchese's unwillingness to appear, but representing the terrible state of mental and bodily prostration to which the dreadful nature of the late events had very naturally reduced him, and which would have rendered it utterly impossible for him to appear in court, but for his indomitable will, and the

high sense of duty, which had led him to think it, under the circumstances his duty to do so.

To no soul had he whispered a word of the Marchese's very marked reluctance to attend at the trial, save to his old and intimate friend of many years standing, the Professor Tomosarchi, whom he had thought it advisable to consult as to the desirability of his seeing the Marchese before he was called on to make the effort. To his surprise he had found Tomosarchi almost as unwilling to see the Marchese, as the Marchese had been to see him. He did not say at once, as the latter had done, that he would not see him. But while admitting the strong desirability that the Marchese should be present at the trial, he yet manifested a strong reluctance, which the lawyer could not understand, to taking any share in the task of persuading and preparing him to do so.

The magistrates, who were all of them old friends of Signor Fortini, and to each of whom he had spoken separately on the subject, had seemed to find no difficulty in understanding, that it was very natural under all the circumstances, that the Marchese should have been terribly affected, both in body and mind, by the late events. It had been suggested to them by the lawyer, that it would be well to avoid, as far as possible, anything that should make it necessary for the Marchese to speak at all, even in saluting him on his entrance. When therefore, just after the court had assembled, the Marchese, trembling and shivering in every limb, was led in by the little door that opened close behind the seat he was to occupy, the magistrates contented themselves with rising and bowing to him in silence. The court, as might have been expected,

was very full; and it was impossible to prevent a very marked and audible manifestation of the shock produced upon the spectators by the changed appearance of one so well known to them from running through the crowd.

Even in the territories of the Pope, a criminal court is in these days an open and public one. There is no jury, and the criminal, or suspected person, may be subjected to any amount of examination on oath. But, in other respects, the method of procedure is not very dissimilar from our own. The prosecution is conducted by an officer analogous to our attorney-general, or by his substitute; and is defended by any advocate of the court whom he may employ for the purpose. The appreciation of the credibility of testimony, the greater or lesser value of circumstantial evidence, the application and interpretation of the law, and the award of sentence, remain with the judges, subject to appeal to a higher court. Moreover, in the present case, the inquiry assumed more of the form of a general attempt to ascertain the solution of an unexplained mystery, than would have been compatible with the forms of our criminal courts; inasmuch as there were two prisoners to be tried for the crime, whom no theory of the circumstances had suggested to be accomplices, and the conviction of either of whom, according to the hypothesis which had been started, involved the absolution of the other.

The judicial oath is administered not as with us, but by requiring the accused person, or the witness, to assert that he is speaking the truth, while placing the extended hand on a carved representation of the crucified Redeemer. And there can be no doubt that

this ceremony has a very strong effect on the imagination and nervous system among the easily moved races of the south. Many a crime has been avowed, because the paralyzed lips of the criminal were absolutely incapable of pronouncing the lie he fully purposed to speak, while he thus openly appealed to the material figure which had the power of enabling the sluggish southern imagination to realize the presence of the Creator.

There would be little interest in detailing at length the proceedings of the trial; since nothing was elicited that would be in any way new to the reader, or that was calculated to throw any fresh light on the circumstances to be inquired into, until the business in hand was nearly concluded.

Every tenderness had been shown to the misfortunes and to the terrible state of suffering of the Marchese. A full statement of his own conduct at the ball, and on the following morning, had been extracted, with very little indulgence in the process, from the Conte Leandro, from whose white and pasty face the perspiration had rained beyond the power of any handkerchief to control it, while he described himself as an eavesdropper, an informer, and a spy. And all that had been required from the Marchese Lamberto was the admission that the Conte Leandro's statements, as far as regarded what had taken place at the ball, were correct.

But the fact was that the case was well-nigh prejudged before the professed trial began. All Ravenna, including the police authorities, who had investigated the matter, and the judges who came into court well instructed in all that had been done, and all that

could be known upon the subject, had made up their minds that the stranger girl was and must have been the criminal. It was infinitely more agreeable to everybody concerned to suppose that such should be the case rather than that such a damning blot should fall on the noblest house in the city, and that in the person of one of the most popular men in it; and, at the same time, it must be owned that the case was so strong against Paolina that a prejudice against her could hardly be called a corrupt one.

Her own conduct during the trial had tended yet farther to impress the minds of all present against her. Not that there was anything in her appearance and manner that was otherwise than calculated to conciliate pity and favourable opinion. Her entrance into the court had excited the greatest interest. She had on a black silk dress made in the simplest and plainest possible fashion; and the colour of it, where the neckband encircled her slender throat, made an absolutely startling contrast with the utterly colourless whiteness of her skin. Her manner was very subdued, very quiet; nor did she exhibit any signs of fear; or much of emotion, save to those who were near enough to her to perceive a quiet, silent, and undemonstrative tear steal occasionally down her dead-white cheek.

But when examined as to her disposal of herself after leaving the church of Apollinare—as to her motives for changing her purpose, if it were true, as she stated, that she did change her purpose of entering the Pineta—she became embarrassed and failed to give any satisfactory reply.

Ludovico had, at an early stage of the proceedings,

been removed from the court, after having been in vain again and again requested by the judges to abstain from interfering with the progress of the case against Paolina.

At last, when almost everybody in the court had made up their minds that there could, in truth, be no doubt that the young Venetian, goaded to frenzy by her jealousy, had been the author of the murder, and quite everybody was convinced that such would be the decision of the judges, the latter were on the point of retiring from the court to confer, and consider their sentence, more as a matter of form, probably, than anything else, when an incident occurred that made a change in the aspect of matters.

---



## CHAPTER VII.

## The Friar's Testimony.

IN a criminal trial in the states of His Holiness the Pope, there is none of that absolute and inflexible adherence to certain rigid forms and rules which gives to many of the proceedings of our courts that character of an inevitable destiny-like march which is so dramatic in its operations—that sense of the presence there of a power greater than that of the greatest of the men concerned in the administration of it, which constitutes on large element in an Englishman's respect for the law. At times this automatic power, which has been thus created Faust-like, by reason of the impossibility of pre-adapting its mechanism to the exigences of every case, works to unforeseen and undesired ends—sometimes even to absurd ones. And, with thinkers of a certain phase of modern thought, it has been a favourite taunt against the average British mind, that it rather delights in the contemplation of such abnormal workings of the great automatic law machine, which it has created. Some manifest mistake or error has occurred. The man supposed to be murdered walks into court; but it is a minute too late; the verdict has been given—the sentence pronounced. All the court—judges, witnesses, counsel—look at each other in dismay; the great law automaton cannot be made to swerve in its path by any power there. And the average Englishman likes the contemplation of such a case, it is sneered; and the sneer may be

joined in by those who, under other systems, have the immediate power of setting any such mistakes right by a word. But the sneer, let the Englishman be assured, would by no means be joined in by the population, who are subject to the action of courts and judges thus able by superior word to direct the course of justice.

The new incident which suddenly arose to change all the aspects of the trial and its results would, as far as the analogy of the Roman mode of proceeding and our own holds good, have been too late in one of our courts to produce the results which it did produce. The judges were on the point of retiring to consider their decision and sentence when they were met at the little private door, by which they were about to leave the court, by one of the ushers. And the consequence of the few words he spoke to them was that they gave an order—turned back; and resumed their places.

It might well have been that the new incident might have been prevented from bringing about the result it was calculated to bring about in the Ravenna Court; but the miscarriage would have been caused in an altogether different way from that which has been spoken as sometimes characterising our own courts.

It was very clear to everybody present that the judges would pronounce Paolina to be guilty of the crime they were investigating; and to everybody present, with one or two exceptions, this was a very agreeable and satisfactory winding-up of the unhappy affair. Ravenna would be able to wash her hands of the matter. It was wholly, both in conception and execution, the work of a stranger. Since so great a

misfortune *had* happened, it could not be more satisfactorily accounted for.

It is probable enough, therefore, that any Tom, Jack, or Harry, who, at that conjuncture, had presented himself at the prefettura for the avowed purpose of bringing a new light to the solution of the mystery which had been already so satisfactorily solved, might have experienced considerable difficulty in obtaining for himself any access to, or hearing from, the judges.

But the person who had now thus presented himself at the prefettura of Ravenna belonged to a body, the very lowest and poorest members of which, in that country, can always find, somehow or other, some means of compassing almost any object which is not disapproved by some superior member of their own corporation. The new-comer was a friar—old Father Fabiano, the priest of St. Apollinare, as the reader may have conjectured.

The police agents had been anxious to produce him there, as the reader knows, and he had baffled their wishes. Now the result which it had been desired that he should contribute to had been brought about, or as good as brought about, without him. What did he want there now?

There was an old usher about the court, however, whose advancing years were beginning to make him disagreeably conscious that the time was at hand when a sentence to a long term of purgatory—to say nothing of any severer doom—might make it exceedingly desirable to him to stand well with all those who are understood to have influence with the government in the world beyond the grave; and, if there had been no such person, the friar would have known somebody

some old or young woman, probably—or he would have known some other friar who knew some such, who would have been able to influence son, brother, lover, or husband, in the way he wished. As it was, Father Fabiano had no difficulty at all in conveying the message he wished to communicate to the judges.

They turned back to their places in the court, to the surprise and sudden awakening of new interest in the audience, and ordered that the new witness who had presented himself should be admitted and heard.

And Father Fabiano, bowed with age, and his hoary head bent down on his breast, but neither shivering nor shaking, advanced to the witness'-table. The crucifix was lying on it, and the friar, with the manner of a man recognizing in a new employment tools which he is well used to, at once stretched out his emaciated and claw-like hand, and made oath that he was about to speak the truth.

The Procuratore of the court then began to examine the old man with reference to his knowledge of the circumstances connected with the visit of Paolina Foscarelli to the church of St. Apollinare, and her disposal of herself after leaving it; but the friar replied that it would be uselessly occupying the time of the court to enter into any such particulars, inasmuch as he had come thither to prove that Paolina had nothing whatever to do with the crime.

"But," remarked the Procuratore, "if it is in your power to do that, why did you not give the necessary information to the Commissary of Police when you were, on several occasions, examined at St. Apollinare?"

"*Signori miei*," said the old man, addressing him-

self to the court in general, "it is no affair of mine to meddle with the administration of human justice. No words that I could say could undo the deed, or bring the murdered woman back to life. Evil enough had been done. Why should I cause further trouble, and sorrow, and shame, to others? It was more fitting to one of my order to leave retribution in the hands of Him who can best award it, and whose mercy may touch the heart of the sinner with repentance."

"But if so, *frate mio*," rejoined the Procurators, "what, pray, is the motive that now brings you here?"

"Surely, the determination that the innocent shall not suffer for the guilty. It seemed to me that it would never be known, save to Him who knows the secrets of all hearts, what hand had done that terrible deed; but now I know that the fallibility of all human judgment has led *questi Signori* to the conclusion that the girl Paolina is guilty, and her condemnation would be a misfortune greater than the first—I knowing the hand which did that deed."

"Ha, you know the murderer; you suppose you know him? You come to offer us your guess,—your suggestion?"

"I come, *Signori miei*, with pain and sorrow and great reluctance, to save you from condemning an innocent person by naming him who is guilty."

A sort of buzz and almost shiver of interest, anxiety, and expectation ran through the court, as the old friar spoke the above words in a stronger voice than that in which he had yet spoken.

"Friar," said the Procuratore solemnly and severely; "it is my duty, before you speak, to warn you to take

heed to what you say. You are about, you say, to make an accusation the most tremendous that one man can bring against another. Bethink you whether you are able to substantiate what you are about to utter. Remember that, if you *cannot* substantiate it, it would be an hundred-fold better that your suspicion should remain unuttered."

The Procuratore, as well as every one else in the court, had little or no doubt that the friar was about to accuse the Marchese Ludovico as the perpetrator of the murder. And some, among whom were Signor Fortini, and Signor Logarini the Commissary of Police, were persuaded that the old man was going to trump up some story in the hope of saving his countrywoman, Paolina.

"Were it not for the necessity of protecting the innocent, Signori, God knows how much I should prefer to carry my terrible secret with me to the grave. *Signori miei*, these eyes saw the deed done, that put the sleeping woman to death. Only God and I, the lowest of his servants! God and I saw the Marchese Lamberto di Castelmare do that deed!"

A loud indignant murmur of incredulity was beginning to rise throughout the crowded court, like the first getting up of a storm wind.

But it was suddenly hushed, and turned into a spasm of horror and intense shock, that made every man hold his breath, when the sound of a sudden heavy fall was heard; and it was seen that the Marchese Lamberto had fallen insensible to the ground.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## The Truth !

THE Professor Tomosarchi was in the court, and had been, as it happened, though unseen by the Marchese, fixing his eyes on him at the moment when the catastrophe narrated in the last chapter occurred. Springing forwards, therefore, the medical man was in a moment by the side of his old friend.

If, according to the strict letter of the requirements of their duty, the magistrates or the police authorities present ought, under the circumstances, to have prevented the free departure of the accused man to his own home, it did not occur to any one to do so. Professor Tomosarchi and Fortini between them, got him, still insensible, to his carriage, and took him to his home.

"Is it more than a mere fainting fit?" said the lawyer, as they both were supporting the person of the insensible Marchese. "Could you not do something to restore consciousness? Can that old friar have spoken the truth?"

"Apoplexy," said the Professor, with a serious and almost scared look into the other's eyes. "Apoplexy, and no mistake about it. Don't you hear the stertorous breathing. No, nothing can be attempted till we get him home. We shall be at the *palazzo* in a minute. We shall see; but I doubt—I doubt!"

"You mean that his *life* is in danger?" asked the lawyer.

"In danger! I have hardly any hope that he will ever return to consciousness or speak another word again."

"Good God! you don't mean that," cried the lawyer, much shocked.

"Indeed I do; it is possible, but very improbable that he should rally sufficiently to survive the attack," replied the Professor.

"Perhaps," rejoined the lawyer, gravely and sadly after a few moments of silence; "perhaps it would be best so. I fear me—I much fear me, that this can hardly be looked on but as the confirmation of that old man's declaration."

The Professor looked hard into the lawyer's eyes, as he nodded his head, without speaking, in grave assent.

They arrived in another minute at the door of the Palazzo Castelmare. The servants ran out, and they carried him up into the chamber where, ever since that fatal Ash Wednesday morning, he had, as Fortini now well understood, been suffering a long agony of remorse, apprehension, despair, all the intensity of which it was difficult to appreciate.

Life was not yet extinct when they laid him upon his bed; and the Professor proceeded to do what the rules of his science prescribed in the all but hopeless effort to combat the attack. But the miserable man had suffered his last in this life, and every effort to bring him back to further torture was unavailing. Within half-an-hour after he had been brought back to his palace he breathed his last.

"It is all over with him," said the Professor, looking up across the bed to the lawyer standing on the



other side of it; "there was no possibility of prolonging his life—happily for him, and happily for everybody connected with him, and for all of us. Who would have thought a short month ago that such a life could have so ended?"

"The 24th of March, Signor Professore, is the anniversary on which, more fervently than on any other day of the year, I thank God for all his mercies," said the lawyer, with grim solemnity.

"I don't understand you, Signor Dottore; what has the 24th of March to do with this?" said Tomosarchi, staring at him.

"On the 24th of March, four-and-forty years ago, the Signora Fortini departed this life, Signor Professore. But for that gracious disposition of Providence, who knows that his lot, or worse, might not have been mine? From Eve downwards, Signor Professore, from Eve downwards, it is the same story—always the same story, in one shape or another—in one shape or another."

The Professor, who was the lawyer's junior by some thirty years, turned away with a shrug of the shoulders, and stepped across the room to the small escrtoire near the window. There opening, without hesitation, and with the manner of a man familiar with the place, a small concealed drawer, he called the lawyer to him.

"Just come here and look at the contents of this drawer, Signor Fortini. There is a curious meaning in them."

Fortini went across from the bed to the escrtoire, and the Professor took from the drawer and showed to him a small coloured drawing of a human form,

with just such a mark on it as had been visible on the spot of the wound which had destroyed La Bianca's life. He showed him also, in the same secret receptacle, a long very finely tempered needle, and a small quantity of perfectly white wax.

"Good God, Professor! Were you aware of the existence of these things here?" cried the lawyer, aghast.

"I knew that they were where I have now found them some four or five months ago—towards the end of last year. You do not remember, probably, some curious details of a crime that was perpetrated a year ago or more in the island of Sardinia.\* I don't know that the details were published save in the medical journals. You know how great an interest our unfortunate friend used to take in all such matters. We talked over that curious case. He doubted the possibility of causing death with so little violence, and by means which should leave so little trace behind them. I showed him how readily and easily it might be done. You may judge then, Signore Dottore, of the misgivings that assailed me when I discovered how that unhappy singer had been put to death. You will understand, too, why he so absolutely refused to see me, and how little desirous I was to see him."

"But, Signor Professore—what should you have done if——?"

"If that girl had been condemned. You may guess that my state of mind has not been a pleasant one. I did not know what to do: I hoped that no conviction would have been arrived at. Of course it would

\* Fact.

have been impossible to keep silence while that poor girl suffered the penalty of the crime I had such strong reason to think was the work of another. Truly it is in all ways best as it is."

"You are taking it for granted that the tribunal will give credit to the friar's testimony; but that is not certain; nay, it is not certain—at least, we do not yet know—we have only his assertion that he saw the Marchese do the deed. With these evidences before us," continued the lawyer, "we can hardly doubt that the fact was so—— But stay—what is this?—a letter addressed to me—'AL CHIAR<sup>MO</sup> SIGNOR DOTTOR GIOVACCHINO FORTINI. *To be opened only after my death, and in case my death shall happen within one year from the present time!*' Perhaps this may render any further doubts as to the conduct we ought to pursue unnecessary. Let us see."

And Signor Fortini sat down to open and read the packet; while the Professor returned to the bed on which the dead man was lying, and occupied himself with paying the last duties to his friend's remains.

The letter was a very long one, consisting of several sheets of closely-written paper. It is unnecessary to add to these pages by giving a transcript of it, because the facts which it detailed at length are either such as the reader is already acquainted with or such as he can readily imagine for himself.

When the narrative reached the events which had occurred at the ball in the early hours of the Ash Wednesday morning, after mentioning the circumstance of the information which had been conveyed to the writer by the Conte Leandro Lombardoni as to the projected expedition to the Pineta, the Marchese

went on to describe the state of mind in which he had left the Circolo. He protested that, although every smallest detail of what he did had remained stamped on his memory with a vivid clearness that would never more be obliterated, it would be unjust to judge his conduct as that of a man in the possession of his senses. He was, he said, *mad*—*MAD!*—and carried away by a hurricane of passions altogether beyond his power to control. He had not formed any distinct intention of following his nephew and La Bianca to the Pineta till he reached his own house. He had happened to approach the Palazzo from the back, through the stable-yard; and had there found old Niccolò, the groom, up. Then the idea of waylaying the pair in the forest had occurred to him. He had ordered a horse to be saddled; and had told the groom to let no one know that he had left the palace. He then went up to his room, dismissed his valet; and locked the door, as the servant had related to Signor Fortini. Then descending to the stables, by one of those private doors and stairs so frequently to be found in old Italian palaces, and generally contrived to communicate with the principal sleeping chamber of the dwelling, he mounted his horse, and rode furiously to the Pineta, quitting the city, not by the Porta Nuova, but by the next gate towards the south. He must have reached the forest before Ludovico and Bianca had left the city. He put his steaming horse into the abandoned hovel of a watcher of the cattle on the marshes; and then skulked about the edge of the wood in the vicinity of the road which enters it from the city.

All this time he had, as he again and again declared in the long and repetitive document in the

lawyer's hands, no formed intention of any sort in his mind. All he knew was that he was mad, and suffering torments worse than any imagination had ever depicted the tortures of the damned; the pulses were beating, and the blood was rushing in his ears and in his eyes, he wrote, in such sort that all sounds seem to him one universal buzzing, and all objects vague and uncertain, and tinged with the colour of blood.

And, in this condition, he waited and waited till almost a wild hope began to creep upon him that the Conte Leandro had lied to him.

Suddenly he saw them coming towards the edge of the wood.

With difficulty he stood upright, resting the front of his shoulder and his forehead against the trunk of a tree, from behind which he glared out, while his eyes were blasted by what he saw.

Judging more sanely than the poor Marchese was able to judge, and putting together all the circumstances and conduct and declarations of the other parties, we may probably conclude, that though he saw enough to madden the heart and brain of a man whose mind had already been warped and distorted by jealousy, he did not see aught that could have been deemed to menace the future happiness of Paolina. No doubt La Bianca, despite her declared intention to make the Marchese Lamberto a good and true wife, had he married her, would have preferred to become Marchese di Castelmare by a marriage with his nephew. No doubt she had a liking for Ludovico of a different kind from that which she had professed to feel for his uncle. No doubt her imagination had

been fired, and her heart awakened to long for such love as she had seen given to each other by Ludovico and Paolina, which she too well understood to be of a kind which, despite her good resolutions, would not be found in her union with the Marchese Lamberto. And no doubt these feelings manifested themselves in her visible manner during the conversation which followed her confession to him of the engagement between her and his uncle.

It may also be suggested to those who have never been called upon to act as Ludovico was called upon to act, under the circumstances of receiving such a communication, so communicated from such a woman, that they would do well not to judge too severely any such parts of his behaviour under the ordeal, as may have been of a nature to produce a very deplorable effect on the jaundiced mind of his uncle, though, in reality, there was little real meaning and less serious harm in them.

Of course the unfortunate Marchese could not be expected to see or reason on what he saw in any such mood or tone. As he said in the writing he had left, what he saw as Ludovico and Bianca entered the forest, side by side, in deep and close talk, made a furious madman of him. He dodged, and watched them, as they sat down together—as they continued to talk in close confidence—till he saw her lay herself down on the bank to sleep, and saw him after awhile quit her side.

Then the devil entered into him, and ruled his hand with a whirlwind power which he could no more withstand than the chaff can withstand the tempest blast.

He came and stood over her as she lay on the turf—the beautiful, noxious creature. She had destroyed him; body, soul, and mind, she had destroyed him. And now—and now—ahi, ahi! After all he had suffered, after paying all the price he had paid! Ah, how lovely as she lay there sleeping—placidly sleeping, she! And he was to be cheated! Her beauty, her love was to be given to another.

No, no, no, poisonous, baneful, sorceress; no, be what might, that hell should never be!

He put his hand to the breast-pocket of his coat, and took from it a small pocket-book.

If man will find evil passions, the devil will always find means. Surely there must be some shadow of truth in the old legends that tell how the fiend aids those who give themselves to him.

The Marchese had, on leaving his chamber, quickly changed the coat he had worn at the ball for a morning one. And it so happened that in that was a pocket-book which contained the articles needed for the perpetration of the murder, placed there by him one day—in times that seemed now ages ago—when he was going to ask some explanation of the facts that had interested him from Professor Tomosarchi.

Like a balefully illumining lightning gleam, the clear memory that those things were there at his hand flashed across his mind.

In another minute the deed was done.

And, in a few minutes more, the Marchese, looking the madman he felt himself to be, got off his panting horse in his own stable-yard, threw the rein to the scared old groom, and regained his room as he had left it. Then the letter went on to speak of the

terrible, the dreadful days and hours which had elapsed since that time. It was during the hours of that first morning, while it seemed to the excited mind of the Marchese that every sound that was audible in the Palazzo must herald the coming of those who had discovered the deed, that it had occurred to him to send for his lawyer and give him instructions for the preparation of his marriage contract. He would lose nothing by doing so, for the fact of his offer of marriage to the murdered woman would assuredly not be kept secret by the old man, her reputed father, and the maid-servant. And the fact of his declaring such an intention, and giving such instructions at that date, would very powerfully contribute to prevent any mind from conceiving the idea that he could have been cognizant of the death of La Bianca at the moment when he was so acting.

And in truth, as the lawyer, examining his own mind, said to himself, it had been this fact which had mainly prevented two or three little circumstances from pointing his suspicions in the direction of the truth.

---



After the return of the Marchese and Marchesa di Castelmare to Ravenna, however, the greater number of the hours of the Contessa Violante were spent in the home of her little god-daughter Violante di Castelmare, and of her friend Paolina.

THE END.

young Marchese's fortunes had the effect of causing his marriage with the Venetian artist to be accepted by the "Society" more tolerantly than, perhaps, might otherwise have been the case. There was a sort of feeling that the whole affair was exceptional; that the higher powers had visibly taken the management of it into their own hands; that it was destined so to be, and must be, as such, accepted. Too much of pity, of wonder, of congratulation, and of condolence, were due from all his world to leave any space for censure on account of his marriage.

Doubtless there were explanations between them as to that hapless expedition to the Pineta; and doubtless they were satisfactory. Assuredly Ludovico never in his moments of most severe self-examination, sharpened, as such self-examination was, by the terrible nature of the result which had seemed to grow out of his conduct on that Ash Wednesday morning, could accuse himself of having done aught that could reasonably be held to leave at his door the responsibility of the events that had followed from it. Italian men are not apt to bring into any prominence the idea that where evil or misfortune is found there fault of some kind must exist also. They are content, for the most part, to accept the notion that all such matters are sufficiently accounted for by attributing them to "*disgrazia*"—the absence of favour, that is to say—the want of that favour at the Heavenly Court which it is on every occasion of life seen to be so necessary to successful well-being to possess at the Courts of Heaven's ecclesiastical, or lay vice-gerents.

Paolina insisted on employing a part of the time which necessarily elapsed before her marriage in com-

pleting the engagement she had undertaken, and the promise she had made to her English patron. But she found herself compelled to beg that some other specimen, chosen from among the wonderful wealth of early Christian art that remains at Ravenna, might be substituted for that in the choir of St. Apollinare. She made the attempt to return to the scaffolding by the side of the window, but she found that her strength was unequal to the task. She could not bear to look on the prospect from that window.

By agreement with her employer, some further figures from the mosaics in San Vitale were substituted for those which had originally been selected in St. Apollinare. Her associations with the former church were of a more pleasant character; and Paolina never visited the desolate old building "in Classe" again. When the specimens selected in lieu of those in the latter building had been completed, Paolina and her friend and protectress returned with them to Venice, where it had been arranged that they were to be delivered to the Director of the Gallery.

In the ensuing Carnival Ludovico came hither, and the marriage was there solemnized. It is not intended to insinuate that he had not often made the journey from Ravenna to Venice in the interval. More of his time was probably passed there than in his native city. From Venice the newly married couple proceeded to Rome, and it was not till three or four years later, that the Marchese and Marchesa di Castelmare, bringing with them their two boys Lamberto and Ludovico, and their little Violante, the most exquisite little fairy that ever was seen, returned to make

the Marchese's ancestral palace, and the Marchese's ancestral city, their home.

There was one other stranger in Ravenna whose lamentations over the fate that had ever brought him thither were as loud as they were sincere. The poor old singing-master, Quinto Lalli, was left, by the death of his adopted daughter, as destitute of the means of support as desolate in his home and heart. He was not worth much; but it would be unjust to suppose of him that his violent outcry on her murderer was wholly or mainly prompted by the former consideration. There had been a real and strong affection between him and his adopted daughter, and her death in truth left him utterly desolate.

Yet he never again quitted the city he so much regretted having ever seen. His comfortable support was adequately provided for by the Marchese Ludovico. And often in after years—on summer evenings on a stone bench beneath a fig-tree in the garden of the cottage provided for him, and in winter at the chimney corner of its tiny parlour—might be seen the tall spare nun-like figure of a grave and gentle lady, earnestly labouring at the somewhat up-hill task of consoling the old man, and striving to shape the teachings of his Bohemian life to a better lesson than he was apt to draw from them. It was the Contessa Violante; and it may be concluded from her occupation both that she succeeded in escaping the pursuit of the Duca di San Sisto, and that her great-uncle the Cardinal did *not* succeed in becoming Pope at the most recent vacancy.

After the return of the Marchese and Marchesa di Castelmare to Ravenna, however, the greater number of the hours of the Contessa Violante were spent in the home of her little god-daughter Violante di Castelmare, and of her friend Paolina.

THE END.













